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BERNARD AND MIRIAM IN THE OLD CHURCH.

Page 47.

HACCO, THE DWARF,

OR

THE TOWER ON THE MOUNTAIN;

AND OTHER TALES.



BY

HENRIETTA LUSHINGTON,

AUTHOR OF THE "HAPPY HOME," "LITTLEHOPE HALL," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. J. PINWELL.

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C O N T E N T S.

	PAGE
HACCO THE DWARF	1
THE FORTUNES OF MIKE LACY	87
LITTLE MAUD	120
DAYLEFORD WINDMILL	192





HACCO THE DWARF; OR THE TOWER ON THE MOUNTAIN.

N a natural platform that projects from the side of a hill—one of the highest in a mountain region far away—stands a lonely tower, called by the people who dwell in the valleys below, “The Magician’s Castle.” It is formed of great blocks of granite, rudely piled together and cemented by clay and mould, from which hang out tufts of stone-crop and draperies of delicate fern-leaves, filling every crevice with such beauty as no human workman could hope to rival. But in winter-time, when the fern is all withered and dead, the old place looks desolate enough—with

its empty door-way and blank window-holes, the mountain summit rising bleak and bare behind it, and the wall of enclosure in front broken and ruined. Standing on the flat tur before the door, one may see great hill-tops rising to the right and left, while far down below lies a green valley, with a river winding through it like a thread of silver, and here and there a farm-house on its bank. Dense woods clothe the lower steeps of the mountains, though even the last stray larches cease many a foot lower than the ledge on which the tower is built. Very seldom is the solitude there disturbed by a human foot-step, for those who wish to ascend the mountain can find an easier path on the other side. Now and then a shepherd in charge of the flocks that feed on the scant herbage of the slopes may take refuge from a storm within the ruin, or a sheep may stray near to drink from the pool hard by; otherwise the tower is unvisited from one year's end to another. If a stranger inquires the meaning of its name, he is told by the old people of the valley below, that they can yet remember the magician who once made his home there; that all night long a lamp burned in the highest

window, for he never needed sleep; and that one old man yet living remembers to have met in the dusk, a tall gaunt figure in black robes, with snow-white beard and burning eyes. On the roof of the tower, they say, was erected a wooden chamber, now fallen to decay, but then filled with strange brazen instruments, with which the magician was supposed to read people's fortunes in the stars; while in the upper room of the tower itself he was believed to spend long hours of the night in trying to find out the secret of making gold—a secret, however, which he certainly never discovered, though he was probably on the point of doing so, when he was interrupted by an awful and mysterious death. Such are the tales yet lingering in the valleys. The truth shall be told here.

Jerome Fauster's ancestors had for many hundreds of years owned the tower on the mountain-side. At one time the broad valley below had been theirs also, and the woods that hung on the opposite slopes; but as years rolled on, the boundaries of their property had gradually contracted, till Jerome, on the death of his father, could only lay claim to a few barren acres sur-

rounding that tower, which was all that now remained of the once formidable castle of his forefathers. But Jerome cared little for the lost grandeur of his family. So long as he had bread to eat, he made no complaint. He had been for years a poor student in some far-off city, and when he received the news of his father's death, he resolved to make his home in the tower, because its situation was favourable for those observations of the stars which made the delight of his life. He had a room built on the roof for his telescopes, and in a few weeks he was settled on the mountain. But he did not come alone. Toiling up the steep path after him was an elderly woman laden with bundles, and leading a mule, on each of whose sides hung a pannier containing a little child, while a boy rode astride on its back. It was old Ursula, the faithful nurse, bringing Jerome Fauster's motherless children to their new home. The mule-driver followed, carrying more bundles and baskets; and thus the little procession reached at length the grassy ledge in front of the tower. Jerome (who carried, slung on his shoulders, a box containing some of the precious instruments he used in his midnight studies) took

a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and entered, passing at once upstairs and out of sight.

"There he goes!" muttered Ursula. "Those stupid things are more to him than his children."

Then she stopped the mule, which drooped its head and panted after the toilsome ascent, and lifted the boy, little Bernard, to his feet; then took Miriam and Cora from their panniers, and placed them gently on the ground. The children were stiff and cramped, and they felt bewildered in the strange place, and half-frightened at the great mountain-tops rising in wild uncouth shapes on all sides, and the mists that now, as evening came on, were rolling like large waves into the valley. Ursula bade them come in out of the cold, so they followed her, thinking the iron-clamped door very like the one they used to see at the prison in the city whence they came; and the air within struck colder than the evening breeze outside. They entered a large round room, the whole size of the tower, lighted only by two small windows in deep recesses and very high from the ground. There was a huge fireplace with iron bars on the hearth, across which were laid logs of wood, while above them hung an iron

kettle. A rude table and several chairs were in the room, and some pieces of worn and faded carpet lay here and there on the stone floor. There was little furniture besides, except two tall oak presses and a small bedstead. The gloom and chilliness of the place made the little girls begin to cry ; but Bernard was more stout-hearted, and tried to put a good face on the matter. He helped Ursula to lay down her bundles, but the old woman seemed almost beside herself as Cora's wailing grew louder and louder. She tried to hush the child with promises of food, but Cora clung to her nurse's skirts, and would not be comforted.

" Let me light your fire, mistress," said the mule-driver, goodnaturedly, as he carried in the luggage he had brought; and, having fastened his mule in the shed hard by, and shaken down before it an armful of hay, he was soon on his knees before the hearth, with his tinder-box, striking a light; then coaxing some small twigs to burn, and blowing them gently, till the great logs caught fire and a cheerful blaze went roaring up the chimney. Bernard stood watching him, and the little ones stopped crying. Old Ursula

took a jug from one of the baskets, and poured its contents into the iron pot. It was some soup she had made in the village below, while Jerome and the children were resting. Now she looked into one of the presses and brought out some basins, which she placed on the table, with spoons beside them; then she found some bread in her basket, and broke some of it into each basin. The mule-driver watched the soup, and when it was heated he poured some into each of the basins, and Ursula placed the children at the table, bidding them give God thanks before they ate their supper. She took some soup herself when they were satisfied, and gave some to the mule-driver, who then bade them all good-night, and took his way back to the valley, telling Ursula where to find him whenever she went to the village, and might need some one to carry her purchases up to the tower. Bernard went to the door and watched the man depart, feeling sorry as the sound of his voice, singing a gay song, died away in the distance.

"Come in, Bernard, and shut the door," said old Ursula. "Take care of your sisters, while I take some supper up to the master."

She left the little ones huddled together on the hearth, half frightened as they looked at the now darkened windows, and listened to the wind making strange wild sounds among the hills. Bernard tried to be brave, as was right for the eldest and a boy ; but his heart felt heavy, and he longed for Ursula's return. She came very soon, and struck the logs till they sent great tongues of flame up the wide chimney, and lighted up the whole room. For some time she was busied with her bundles, unpacking the children's clothes and laying them in the press ; but at last she came to the fireside, and sat down, with Cora on her knee and the other children sitting at her feet. For a little while she was silent, gazing into the fire and playing with Cora's curls, as if her thoughts were far away. The little ones were silent too. They were sat sfiid to have her near them, and felt quite safe and content. She was good and faithful ; she had been their mother's nurse in childhood, and had never left her till death parted the mother from her children, and then Ursula had promised not to desert the poor little ones, but to do her best for them. They had ever been her first thought—her first care. She had been

very tender with them, and they loved and trusted her.

By and by old Ursula ceased to look into the glowing fire, and turned her eyes on the three faces that now looked happy in the red light.

"Children," she said, "we have come to a new home to-day, very different from the one we have left. I hardly believe it is myself and you in this large room, by this wide hearth."

"It is very lonely, Mother Ursula," said Miriam, creeping still closer and clinging to the old woman's hand. "There are such strange noises, they frighten me."

"Yes, little one," answered the old woman, kindly; "we don't hear the watchman call out the hours, or the carriages roll along the paved street here. Bernard won't see the soldiers march by the windows with music of trumpets and drums, and Miriam will not be able to look at the gay ladies going to Court, all shining with jewels and wearing great plumes of feathers in their heads."

Little Cora looked up and said—

"We shan't see the king here. Do you remember when he threw me a rose? I've got it

now, all brown and shrivelled, in my own ivory box. Did you bring my ivory box, Mother Ursula?"

"Yes," the old woman answered, kissing her. "I've brought all your little things, and you shall have them to-morrow, and help me to put them away in the cupboard."

"The king said Cora was a little rose herself," remarked Miriam.

"We shall all be roses up here," replied Ursula, laughing. "The mountain breezes will bring the colour into our cheeks, and make us strong and active."

"Will papa be like a rose?" asked Cora.

Ursula smiled and then sighed.

"Not papa, I am afraid," she said. "It takes the colour out of people's faces, and the strength out of their limbs, to sit up night after night gazing up at the sky ; and he'll do that more than ever here when the nights are fine."

A silence came over them all, and again old Ursula looked into the fire as if she were thinking, and the children thought of the father living apart from them and all the world. A word now and then, or a pat on the head, was all the notice

he ever bestowed upon his children, and more frequently he would pass them as if he knew not they were near. He would be more than ever separated from them now—he at the top of the tower and they below.

“It seems to me,” said Ursula, as if thinking aloud, and with her eyes still fixed on the glowing embers, “it always seems to me as if it ought to make people’s hearts more tender to study the good God’s wonderful works, and to see how he cares for everything, great and small. But it isn’t so with the master. He cares less and less for what goes on down in this world. It’s well that I’m here to care for these poor lambs, now their mother is an angel in heaven.”

“Does papa keep on looking up to the sky to try to see mama?” asked little Cora.

“O Cora!” exclaimed Bernard, half angrily; but Ursula answered gently—

“No, my child, he does not hope to see her now. He looks at the stars, and tries to learn something about them—how they move, and why. It takes a whole life, I believe, to learn a very little about them.”

“He telleth the number of the stars, and

calleth them all by their names ;' it is only God that can do that," said Miriam, gravely.

"I peeped once through the great telescope," said Bernard, "and saw the moon. There were great dreary hills and plains, looking so near me that I was frightened and ran away."

"I peeped through the telescope once," said Ursula. "It was a long time ago, when Bernard was a baby. The mistress and I had just found out that the child had cut his first tooth, and we were so proud and happy, that when the master came in, with a wild sort of joy in his look, we thought he must have heard the news. But he never seemed to see the child. He came up to the mistress in his excited way, and said—'This is a grand day, a glorious day !' 'Yes, Jerome,' she said, with loving tears in her eyes, 'he has never cried or complained, and see ! it's like a little pearl ;' and she put her finger tenderly into the baby's mouth. But the master never heeded her. 'Come with me,' he said, 'and you come too, Ursula ; you must see this glorious sight.' The mistress sighed and laid the baby in his cot, and we went up to the place where the telescope was kept. 'Look !' cried the master ;

'what do you see, Ursula?' (for I was first, seeing the mistress troubled and disappointed, so I put myself forward). I knelt down and put my eye to the glass and cried out, half in fear at the stars that seemed to have come so near to me. 'What do you see?' said the master again. 'I see the stars, sir,' I said, 'seeming quite near.' 'And what else do you see?' he asked, quite impatiently. 'Nothing else but a spot that looks like a little lump of white wool against the sky.' 'That's it!' he shouted, 'that's it! That is a comet, Ursula—a comet not noted in any of my books. That is Jerome Fauster's comet.' I suppose it was a wonderful thing, but I didn't understand it, so I went back to the baby rather disappointed. A long while afterwards, the mistress showed me in a book the name of Jerome Fauster's comet. 'Ursula,' she said, 'Jerome tells me that the comet you saw will not return again for two hundred years. It will matter little to any of us then.'"

"Two hundred years!" repeated Bernard; "it is a long long time, Mother Ursula."

"Yes; we shall have lived our lives out before half of it is past," she said; "but when the comet

comes back, Jerome Fauster's name will be in every one's mouth again. I believe it makes him quite happy to be sure of that."

Ursula spoke warmly, and then recollect ed she ought to say nothing to the children against their father ; so she went on hastily—" It must be very strange to the master to be here again, where he used to play as a little boy. I don't think he's ever seen this tower since he was sent to college, in the place we've come from. He never could bear to leave his books, and by and by he married and settled far away. It will be good for you, my lambs, to grow up here among the hills. The master's forefathers and yours were a brave, God-fearing race, and they used to defend their country from invaders, and help the weak and the poor down in the valleys. This is the day of small things for the family now, but you can be honest, and good, and true. Old Ursula will teach you all she knows, and we must work hard and live in peace together. We will have goats and poultry, and you must help me to tend them. You will see to-morrow morning that it is a glorious place where we live, here on the mountain, and you will learn to love all the

sounds that frighten you now. But come, we must not talk any more to-night."

The old woman lifted Cora to the ground, and then bade the children kneel around her while she prayed, their voices following hers, for a blessing on their new home, for peaceful rest, and all things needful. When the prayer was done and they rose from their knees, she lighted a lamp, took Cora in her arms, and bidding Miriam follow, led the way upstairs, leaving Bernard to undress himself by the light of the fire. The little girls called out good-night to their brother till the door closed upon them, and they found themselves in a room much smaller than the one below, with a tall, gloomy-looking bed for Ursula, and a tiny cot on each side of it for themselves. There was a heavy sofa also, and there were old-fashioned wardrobes and chairs, but the whole was not uncomfortable; and the tired children were soon laid in their white nests, dropping asleep in spite of the winds without, and the occasional sound of their father's step in the room above. Ursula went downstairs again to fasten the great door and see Bernard settled in his little bed; then she kissed the boy and bade him be of

good cheer, for the Lord would take care of him. Bernard would gladly have had her stay by his bedside till he slept, but he was ashamed to ask it, so he watched her mount the spiral stairs, and turn at her door, with the light of the lamp on her kind face, to say one last good-night. He felt very lonely when the door closed upon her, and for a few minutes he hid his head under the bed-clothes and held his breath; but the fear passed soon, and he looked around him. The great logs were nearly burnt out, but the flickering light still played on the roughly-plastered walls and quaintly-carved presses. The sweeping blast now and then shook even the heavy door and rattled the windows in their casements, but through the highest panes Bernard caught a glimpse of the stars. He could not read the wonders of the sky, as his father was even then doing; but those calm and beautiful stars had a message for him also. They seemed to tell him of the good God's care, and of the home in heaven where his mother dwelt; so, with a smile on his lips, Bernard fell asleep.

When he awoke the next morning it was already broad daylight, and Ursula was moving

softly about the room preparing breakfast. She had hung a curtain across from wall to wall, enclosing Bernard's bed and a little space near it where he could dress himself. When he was ready to join her, she had thrown open the great door which faced the east, so the early sunbeams floated in, bright and warm. Outside was a group of five or six goats waiting to be milked, and near them on the ground sat a strange figure, to whom Ursula handed a jug, which was received with a grunt, and the creature immediately set himself to the task of milking a large white goat. Bernard looked on with curiosity. The figure, whether man or boy he could not tell, had a large head, with long yellow hair flowing over his shoulders from beneath a leather cap, decorated with two peacock's feathers. His mouth was wide, showing a set of large white teeth; his nose flat; and his eyes, which were very blue, had a wandering restless movement, as if he were anxious to observe everybody and everything around him. His body was most uncouthly formed, very short and square, with long arms and large hands and feet; and he wore a rough brown woollen frock fastened round his waist by a leathern belt, while his

boots and gaiters were of undressed goatskin. At any other time, Bernard, town-bred child as he was, would have watched with interest the new milk frothing in the jug, but now he had eyes only for the stranger, who looked at him in return with a grin that seemed meant for kindness. When the white goat had been milked, she walked on with a stately pace, and, at a wild cry from the dwarf, another goat came in her place. Meanwhile Ursula had returned to her work indoors, and Bernard felt half-inclined to follow, only he could not help still watching the proceedings outside. After a while he took courage when the blue eyes were fixed upon him, and said, pointing to the goats—

“Are these yours? Where do you live?”

The only answer was a grunt, accompanied by a shake of the head, and the dwarf went on with his task. Bernard felt surprised, but his attention was arrested at the moment by the sound of a step, and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked towards the east, and saw his father coming up the path by which they had all arrived at the tower on the previous evening. Jerome walked slowly and wearily, and his face was very pale.

He seemed chilled by the morning air, delightful as Bernard felt it to be, for he drew round him the loose black dressing-gown which he commonly wore, and shivered as he paused for a moment to look back into the valley. His long flaxen hair and beard glistened in the sunshine, but his eyes were dull and sunken, like those of a person tired with watching. Bernard had been taught never to disturb his father, so he did not venture to approach him, but waited anxiously, hoping for a word or a look as he passed. He was not disappointed. Jerome laid his hand on the child's head and bade God bless him ; and Ursula, who came to the door at the moment, looked pleased.

"I'm tired, Ursula," he said. "Bring me some breakfast, and then I shall try to rest."

She offered him a chair by the well-swept hearth, and pointed to the table ready spread for the meal, but he put his hand to his forehead and said—

"No, I must go to my own room. Take care of the little ones, Ursula, and get them all they need, so far as you can ;" and so he went up the stairs to his lonely room. Soon Ursula fetched Miriam and Cora, after she had carried to

their father his coffee and oaten cakes. The little girls were alarmed at the sight of the dwarf, and clung to Ursula's dress as she stood in the doorway. The milking was over, and the dwarf handed the great jug to Ursula, who went back into the house and poured some of the milk into a tin can, which she gave into his hands as he stood waiting at the door. When she had done so she began making signs with her fingers, much to the children's surprise, the dwarf meantime watching her with a look of intelligence; and, as soon as she ceased, putting the can on the ground, he moved his fingers about in the same mysterious way, only far more rapidly than she had done, then waving his leathern cap and lifting the can with a grim smile, he gave a shrill cry which brought the goats round him, and proceeded to drive them down the hill. Once or twice he turned back and nodded to the children, who continued silent till he had disappeared down the path, and then poured forth a torrent of questions. Who was this odd figure? Was he a man or a boy? Where did he come from? Would he come again? Why did he not talk? and why did she move her fingers to him? Ursula would not re-

ply until her charges were seated at the table with basons of bread and milk before them.

"Now, I will tell you," she said, at last. "This poor man that you have just seen was brought here many years ago by the old master, your grandfather. The woman at the inn in the valley told me of him yesterday. The poor creature was a mis-shapen child, deaf and dumb, and the old master saw some men ill-use him, so he had the cruel men taken before the judge and condemned to a long imprisonment; and he brought the boy, who had not a soul to care for him, up here to the tower. Quite scared and foolish they say the poor creature was then, but he seemed to know when he was well treated, for he wouldn't let his new master out of his sight, but followed him like a dog all day, and lay down to sleep at his door all night. By and by he grew more sensible, and the master took pains with him and taught him all manner of things. At first he had been cruel to animals, but he became more gentle when he knew what it was to be kindly treated himself, so he was trusted with the care of the goats. I asked him just now where he lived, and he said, just down below in a shed

built against the rock. He and the goats all live together, and he likes to have a little milk to drink with his bit of black bread."

"Did he tell you that when he moved his fingers about?" asked little Cora, trying to imitate with her small hands the motions she had lately been watching. "How could you know what he meant, Mother Ursula?"

"I should have been as much puzzled as you, my dear," replied Ursula, smiling, "only that when I was a child I had a deaf and dumb playfellow, and I have never forgotten how to talk with my fingers. I had not done it for years, but the moment I saw his motions I remembered it all, only I am not so quick as I was."

"Oh! do teach us to talk with our fingers," cried Bernard. "I should like to be able to talk to the poor man. What is his name, Mother Ursula?"

"They call him Hacco," replied Ursula, "which seems an outlandish, un-Christian sort of name, but no one knows where he got it. The men that were cruel to him had brought him from a far country, and they made money by showing his dwarfish body to strangers, and

beat him because he cried and would not dance."

"I'm glad my grandfather took him away," said Miriam, flushing with indignation and pity.

"Yes; and the poor fellow was very grateful," continued Ursula. "When his master died he refused food, and the housekeeper here could only persuade him to take a little milk each day. She was almost a stranger, for the master's old servant had died just before him, and this one was not able to talk with her fingers. When Hacco saw the funeral leaving the tower, he shut up his goats in the shed, and followed at a little distance down to the churchyard in the valley. When all was over and every one gone to their homes, he crept to the grave and laid himself down with his face on the fresh earth that hid his dear master from him. He was found there next morning by some of the neighbours. They brought him food, but he motioned it away; they tried to lift him up, but he resisted and hid his face again. They were troubled about him, for they knew he must die if he stayed there and would not eat; and even the rude boys who had been in the habit of jeering at his strange figure whenever he showed

himself in the valley, were grave and pitiful when they saw the faithfulness of the poor dumb creature. At last some of the men bethought themselves of going to the good old priest down there, to ask what they should do. He came and tried to coax Hacco away, but he found that nothing but violence would move him, and his gentle heart could not bear to try that. Presently, after a little thought, the priest said to the men—

“ ‘Go and fetch the white goat. I have seen poor Hacco fondle it when I was at the tower.’

“ When the goat was brought the priest took the rope from the man who led it and went up to Hacco, who still lay stretched on the ground, with his face hidden in his hands, while the crowd stood round at a little distance watching what would happen. It was the great white goat with long silken hair, that you saw this morning. The priest led her close to Hacco, and then stood still. Presently the gentle creature bent down, and began softly to lick the dwarf’s head. He started up, and when he saw what it was, he threw his arms round her neck, leaned his head against hers, and sobbed and cried like a child. There were many in the crowd that

could not help crying too. Hacco was very gentle and tractable after that. He took food when the priest gave it to him, and rose up from his master's grave and led the goat up the mountain. From that day he has gone on doing his duty steadily, just as he had done it before. Ah, children!" added Ursula, as she rose from her chair, "it pleases the Lord sometimes to put his jewels into rough caskets, and we in our conceit may often overlook them."

"Do teach us to talk with our fingers now, directly," said little Cora. "We want to talk to poor Hacco."

"Not now, child," replied Ursula. "This evening in the twilight I will begin, but I am busy now. You may all go and play outside; but mind you do not go beyond the boundary-wall."

Gladly they ran out, eager to look round them; for before breakfast their attention had been so absorbed by the dwarf and his goats, that they had not looked beyond. They paused breathless with awe at the glorious sight that met their eyes. The mist was rising higher and higher, till, even while they gazed, it rolled

away from the highest rocky peaks of the opposite mountain, which now stood out sharply against the blue sky, while almost from its summit a torrent came leaping and tumbling from crag to crag with a sound like thunder, till it reached the valley, and subsided into a quiet river. To the right and left were hill-tops, some rocky and bare, some grassy, some brown with dying fern, some aflame with yellow gorse, some crimson and purple with heather. Many a waterfall glistened among the hills and made a pleasant sound, losing itself at last in the woods that clothed the slopes close down to the valley. It was now autumn, and the oaks were turning. Here and there a red or yellow bough gleamed like a torch among the green. High up on the hill-sides mountain sheep were feeding, sometimes above the high crags, where a mouthful of herbage tempted their fearless feet, and where they looked like pearls scattered by a careless hand.

When the children recovered from their first surprise, they began to examine their new home more carefully. Clambering up the boundary-wall, they could see the village in the valley,

where they knew their grandfather was buried. They could also look down on a wood of larches far below on their own mountain; but the descent was so steep that it made them giddy, so they retired to explore nearer the tower. They found a shed containing faggots, logs of wood, and a little hay; and here they managed to amuse themselves for a while. Afterwards they discovered a pool, neatly paved with round pebbles, into which trickled a clear spring, coming down from the rocky height behind the tower.

In the afternoon, when the frugal dinner was over, and Ursula had finished her day's work, she took the children down a zig-zag path to the place where Hacco lived with his goats. The shed was built against a high wall of rock, with a wood of larches in front and on each side of it, sloping downwards towards the valley. A bright rill leapt down the face of the rock, and after filling a basin carefully lined with pebbles beside the shed, continued its merry course among the trees. The dwarf was busy sawing into logs for burning a larch-tree, from which he had already cut the lesser branches and tied them into faggots; and he did not see the children and

Ursula till they were close beside him. His face brightened with pleasure, and he took off his cap and stood with it in his hand, looking on the little faces, which smiled on him in return. Even Miriam and Cora tried not to seem shy and frightened, now that they knew poor Hacco's story. The goats were browsing on the grass and weeds that grew in the wood, and near them lay a noble mastiff, blinking at the new-comers, but too lazy to rise and greet them. Hacco saw the little girls shrink back as they caught sight of the dog, and he instantly sat on the ground beside it, shook the great paws, pulled the ears, and caressed the great black muzzle, as if to show they had no need to fear his favourite. Bernard soon joined him, but Miriam and Cora preferred the gentle-looking goats, which ate bunches of grass from their hands and gazed at them with soft dark eyes. Hacco showed them the inside of his hut, pointing to the little wooden crib where he slept, and which he had adorned with all sorts of devices, rudely carved, yet not without taste. Ursula told him with her fingers how pretty they all thought his handy-work, and he told her in return how the white goat always

lay on the floor of the hut close to his crib, and how the others made way for her, while the old mastiff always took his place across the doorway. When Ursula said it was time to go, the children nodded kindly to the dwarf, and little Cora put out her hand to bid him goodbye. He seemed puzzled for a moment, and then, as if by a sudden thought, pulled the peacock's feathers from his cap and gave one to each of the little girls; then rushing into the hut, he took from beneath his crib a stick with a handle cut into the form of a dog's head, and offered it to Bernard, who received it with delight. Ursula thanked him in her finger-language, and followed the children up the hill. In the evening, when the great logs were blazing on the hearth, the little ones took their first lesson in the finger-alphabet.

The next day was very wet. Hopelessly from dawn till dark the rain beat against the windows, and when Bernard climbed on a chair to look out, not a hill-top was to be seen, nothing but a swaying sheet of falling water. Ursula had enough to do to find employment for the children indoors; but the long day came to an end at last, and in the evening the storm abated. When it was

nearly dark, Jerome came down stairs, wrapped in a cloak, with a broad-brimmed hat drawn over his brows. He paused to look at the group assembled round the blaze, and even came near and touched little Cora's bright head. All watched him in silence, and Ursula rose to receive his orders.

"I am going away, Ursula," he said, "but I shall return the day after to-morrow. I leave everything in your charge. Good night, children."

The three young voices answered good night in chorus, and Ursula unbarred and threw open the great door, letting in a gust of wind that made the firelight flicker and dance. Jerome crossed the threshold, gathered his cloak about him, and Ursula closed the door and barred it again. For some time the little ones sat in silence, thinking of their father splashing down the wet steep, with the wind swirling round him, and the rain now and then dashing into his face.

"Where is he going?" Bernard inquired at last.

"Down to the valley to meet the mail-waggon," answered Ursula. "He knew the path so well as a boy, that he says he can find it as well in the dark as in the day."

Again they all sat round the hearth in silence, and Ursula looked anxious in spite of her brave words. The little ones crept very close to her, and hushed their breathing to listen to the storm. Suddenly there came a heavy knock against the door, making little Cora scream with fear. Ursula looked startled; then rising, said—

“It is only the master come back. He has found the path too bad for him to go down the mountain to-night.”

However, before unfastening the door, she called from the window to ask who was there. No reply came in words, but the knock was repeated more loudly than before. Ursula stretched her head out of the window, so that she could catch a glimpse of the white door-step, and distinguish, even in the darkness, a figure standing there. While she strained her eyes to see if this were Jerome, and called loudly, the clouds drifted for a moment from the face of the moon.

“Ah!” cried Ursula, “it is poor Hacco,” and she at once opened the door to him. The dwarf stepped in, followed by his great mastiff, and stood blinking at the fire-light, the water dripping from his garments and making a pool on the stone

floor. Bernard took his hand, and led him forward till he reached the full blaze of the wood-fire, stretching his arms lovingly towards it. Ursula placed a wooden stool for him, and then busied herself to get a bowl of hot bread and milk, which he took gratefully, with a low murmur of satisfaction. The mastiff stretched himself on the hearth and went to sleep; while the children clustered round, delighted at the visit which had varied their evening's amusement. When Hacco had finished his supper, there ensued a long finger-talk between him and Ursula, quite unintelligible to the little ones; but when it was over, Ursula observed to them—

“ As far as I can make out, he says he was coming up the path below the wood with a goat that had strayed, and he ran against the master going down; so he came to see if he could be of any use to us. I thought it would please him if I asked him to stay the night, and so it did. He and his dog will sleep here by the fire.”

She fetched a mattress and laid it on the floor near the hearth, with some warm rugs, and pointed them out to Hacco with signs which he certainly understood, for he rubbed his great hands together

and smiled with glee. Bernard sat down by the mastiff, who was now awake, with his head resting on his forepaws, watching the proceedings with an air of much gravity and wisdom. Bernard began to caress him.

"What an old beauty he is," he said, "with his yellow coat and black muzzle and ears! Hasn't he got a name, Mother Ursula? Do ask Hacco what the good old beast is called."

Ursula presently said that the dog's name was Lion, a name his noble size and strength deserved.

"Dear old Lion!" Bernard said, as he caressed the huge head; "dear old yellow Lion, golden Lion!"

The dog licked his hands, and was so gentle that even little Cora was won ere long to lift his great paw and play with his long ears.

When Ursula said the evening prayer, with the children kneeling round her, the poor dwarf knelt also, and covered his face with his hands.

"Does he know about Jesus?" whispered Miriam, as she followed Ursula upstairs to bed.

"Something he knows about Him, poor soul!" replied Ursula; "God alone knows how much.

He seems to understand what prayer means ; but who can tell what goes on in the heart of the poor afflicted creature ? ”

“ God knows , ” Miriam said, softly.

“ Yes , ” Ursula replied, stooping to kiss her . “ Let us be thankful that God knows all . ”

Bernard begged to have a chink of his curtain left open after he was in bed, that he might watch Hacco still sitting over the fire carving a piece of wood, while golden Lion lay quietly at his feet. The next morning all symptoms of storm had passed, not a cloud was in the sky. When Bernard woke, Hacco was already gone to tend his goats. The little boy was soon out of doors, calling to his sisters to come and see how wildly the waterfall was leaping down the rock behind the tower, and how many fresh rills were glittering on the heights all round their home. Presently a sweet sound of bells came floating up from the valley, and Bernard remembered it was Sunday.

Ursula came out with the little girls, and stood listening to the bells.

“ One would hardly think they were three miles off , ” she said, “ they sound so sweet and

clear. We must be content to-day with this temple of the Lord's own building, my lambs," she continued, waving her hand towards the hills. "It is a glorious place—is it not children? We will sing, 'O ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord : praise him and magnify him for ever ! O all ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord : praise him and magnify him for ever !'"

She chanted the words softly, and the children joined her—not Cora, but the others, who had often been with her to the dark old cathedral in the city, whence they came. They had liked the solemn grey arches and the richly-coloured windows ; but the glory of the hillside under the sunny blue sky was far beyond the glory of any human work, and they felt it to be so as they sang. The day passed very peaceably. Ursula read to the children, talked to them, and taught them to repeat verses and hymns, as she had taught their mother long years ago. In the evening they walked down to the larch-wood and explored its lower depths, where great crown-ferns waved like plumes of feathers, some still green, some brown, some gold-coloured.

The moon was up when they returned home,

followed by Hacco and Lion, who were again to pass the night in the tower. After supper the children called on Ursula to tell them a story ; and she began to talk to them, as she often did, of their mother, whom even Bernard could scarcely remember. It was in a home very unlike the tower, that their mother had spent her childhood—a square red house with a broad terrace before it, overhanging a deep blue river ; lawns beside it, and beds of radiant flowers, and fountains, and marble urns and figures, and choice trees ; not a hill anywhere within sight, only smooth flats covered with grain, stretching out to the sky-line. Ursula spoke fondly of the little girl who used to dance on the terrace, and throw flowers into the blue river ; she told them how good and loving the little girl had ever been, and how, as she grew to womanhood, every one loved her, till at last a stranger came and took her away from her pleasant home to a dull city, where, however, she was cheerful and gay as a little bird that sings in a cage. When Ursula added that the stranger's name was Jerome Fauster, the children knew that she had been talking to them of their mother.



URSULA AND THE CHILDREN.



The next morning Jerome Fauster returned to the tower, and Ursula told the children she must leave them for a few hours, to go down to the valley to buy provisions. It was in vain that they begged to go, too.

"It is too far for you," Ursula said. "I will return as soon as I can. Do not pass the boundary wall, and be good and quiet till I come home."

* It was a long sad morning for them, and they wandered up and down the enclosure, longing for Ursula's return. She came at last, followed by a mule, laden with provisions, and driven by the same man who had come with them on their first arrival at the tower. Bernard was delighted to see the good-natured mule-driver again, and soon got leave to ride the mule part of the way down the hill.

Very soon, the family at the tower settled into a way of life that was altered but little for several months. The father lived apart in the upper chamber, only seen when he passed out to ramble on the mountain in the twilight, or to go away on a visit of two days almost weekly, to meet in a distant place learned men like himself, and dis-

cuss all the work he had done in his solitude. Ursula did all the business of the house, assisted gradually more and more by the children. The little girls learned to make their own and Bernard's beds, and to wash the cups and plates after their meals ; to sweep the floors and wipe the dust from such of the furniture as was within their reach. Bernard could carry bundles of faggots from the shed, or drag in logs of wood with the help of a little cart which Hacco had made for him ; or he could go to the pool many times a day, dip his jug in the clear water, and carry a supply to Ursula. He grew tall and strong, and felt himself manly in being useful. When the day's work was done, Ursula called the little ones round her, and taught them all that she knew herself. They could all read now, and she sometimes brought a new book with her when she returned from her weekly visit to the valley. It was a great joy to Bernard whenever, on opening the pannier of provisions as the mule stopped at the door, he found a new book at the top. Ursula always chose it wisely. It was a history of their country, or the story of a good life ; a description of foreign lands, or a book of hymns

and songs such as the little ones could learn by heart.

Very soon after coming to the tower, Ursula made an arrangement with the friendly mule-driver to come half-way up the mountain on Sunday, when the weather was fine, with his mule, that the little girls might ride in the panniers and Bernard on the animal's back, down to the church in the valley, which was too far off for the young ones to walk to it. They went in the afternoon, when the priest was wont to catechise the children of his flock, after the prayers were said. It was the same good old priest of whom Ursula had spoken, when she told the children about poor Hacco. His face, with long white hair and beard and mild blue eyes, was so kind, and his manner of speaking so gentle, that even Cora soon conquered her shyness, and answered like the rest. He noticed the little strangers, and spoke to Ursula in the porch.

"You are the nurse from the tower?" he said. "Well! your children have given good answers to all I have asked them. They have been well taught, I can see already. You are a

good woman," he continued, nodding kindly to her; "you have done your duty by the motherless little ones;" and then he patted Bernard's head and told him to come always, and that he, on his part, would call to see them at the tower ere long. He kept his word. When they were at play one afternoon, and Ursula was within, kneading bread and mixing a little cake that was to be a surprise for Cora, the old priest rode up the mountain-path on his pony. Bernard held the bridle while he dismounted, while Miriam and Cora welcomed the old man with shy smiles. He asked Ursula to conduct him upstairs to visit her master, and he sat for an hour with Jerome, among the huge brazen instruments and piles of books in the upper chamber, talking of the wonders of earth and sky in language that would have sounded like a foreign tongue to the little ones below. He talked to them, however, when he came down, in language they could well understand, looked at their books, and advised Ursula about their lessons. They were quite sorry when he mounted his pony and left them, though he promised to come again; and, as he went down the

hill, he smiled kindly at Hacco who was on his way up, but who turned to lead the pony down the steepest part of the descent.

It was early autumn when Jerome brought his family to the tower. As the days passed on, the trees in the valley lost their bright leaves, and the woods looked bare and brown. More and more often the hill-tops were hidden in cloud and vapour, the wind roared down the hollows in wilder gusts, the rain beat louder against the old walls. By and bye came frost and snow, and the air grew clearer, so that many a time the white-robed peaks might be seen, bright and glorious against the blue sky. Soft snow-showers fell at night, and covered the platform before the tower, but the morning sun melted them away; and though the stream that trickled into the pool became a mere thread of silver, the frost never bound it utterly, and the supply of water never failed. In the long winter evenings, Hacco came to the tower and taught Bernard to weave baskets, and carve wood, while Ursula and the girls worked, and old Lion slept on the hearth. Sometimes they varied their amusements by reading aloud, or singing old ballads with Ursula, the

storm outside howling an accompaniment. The pretty white goat may still have slept by Hacco's crib, but Ursula had not the heart to send the poor dwarf down to his miserable shed in bad weather, so he usually passed the night on a rug by the fire, with the mastiff beside him.

The children were by this time able to talk with their fingers, and to understand Hacco's rapid signs. They tried to repeat to him some of the strange things they learned from books, and he laughed, but they could not tell whether he understood. Ursula seemed more successful at times, when she tried to tell him of heaven and of God. She almost cried when he pointed first to the tower, then to the churchyard below, where his old master was buried, and then upwards with a look of bright intelligence, as if he would say that he knew his kind friend was gone to a better place, and not sleeping for ever in his grave. Ursula pointed to the poor dwarf himself, and then raised her hand also towards the sky. He understood her, but shook his head sadly and humbly, and hid his face in his hands. She fetched one of Cora's books, and showed him a picture of the sick and maimed going to One who

received and healed them all, and as she did so she again pointed to him and then to the sky. He understood her meaning, and a smile of peace came over his face. At other times he was unable to comprehend, and would only shake his head or look hopelessly stolid, but these occasional gleams of understanding made good old Ursula feel a great interest in him.

When spring came, and the snows melted from the hill-tops and came leaping in noisy torrents down the rocky chasms, the children rejoiced at the change. Over the larch-wood and the trees of the valley came creeping a pale green mist, that was but the promise of the foliage which the spring breezes were to shake out on every bough. Labourers were busy in the fields of the valley, here and there the corn had already pierced the brown earth. Sheep were dotted over the slopes, and tender lambs tempted the huge mountain-eagles from their rocks above, to sweep and hover over the valley, watching for a chance of carrying off their prey, if the shepherd relaxed his vigilance for a moment. The fern was already to be found in the larch-wood in soft downy horns, but half uncurled, and

Hacco was busy trying to make a garden for herbs and a few flowers in a sheltered corner.

One bright and cloudless day, Ursula went down the hill to make her usual purchases. Jerome was absent, but Hacco was digging in the wood, so she thought the children would be quite safe.

“Stay within the boundary wall, or go to the wood, as you like,” she said, as she departed. They were well used now to her leaving them and did not mind it; but, on this particular day, for some reason, they grew tired of their usual games and became restless and impatient. Hacco came up once to ask if they wanted any thing, but they shook their heads, and he returned to his work.

“Oh! what can we do?” said Miriam, disconsolately. “It will be two hours before mother Ursula returns, and I am so tired of going up and down here.”

Discontent is very catching, and Bernard immediately agreed with his sister.

“It’s dull work, to be sure,” he said, “always being here, just inside the wall. Why shouldn’t we go outside? There’s nothing to hurt us.”

"Mother Ursula told us not to go," Miriam answered in a hesitating tone.

"She only meant we must not go where we should come to any harm," argued Bernard. "Now just look here; some of the bricks are gone out of this wall, and we can easily get over it. I've been up to the top of it many a time. The hill is quite smooth on the other side, just like this, and we can take a little walk and come back again. Come along, Miriam!" and, as he spoke, he sprang up to the top of the wall and jumped down on the other side. Miriam was only too willing to follow, but she did not know what to do with Cora, who cried and declared she would not go. At last Miriam pacified the child by taking her to the larch-wood, to sit on a stone with Lion beside her, and watch Hacco digging. There Miriam left her, and ran back to leap over the wall and join Bernard. With a strange, guilty sense of freedom, the two truants went on over the smooth hill-side, winding gradually round, till they came in sight of a new valley. Here the hill became more abrupt, and the path narrowed till it looked like a thread, with a precipice of many hundred feet descending

from it on one side, and steep cliffs rising to a great height on the other. Danger was not to be thought of in the excitement of this new scene, and the children had grown steady of eye and sure of foot in their journeys up and down the mountain ; so they went on fearlessly, sometimes clutching at a bush or a rock, as loose stones slipped from under their feet down the steep. By and bye the slope became more gentle, and the path led gradually down to the foot of the mountain. Green meadows were there, with quiet cattle, feeding or stopping to gaze fearlessly at the strangers, and beyond the meadows was a wood into which Bernard and Miriam passed, wondering whither their adventure would lead them. The wood opened out at last into a smooth green, beyond which rose the gabled wall of what had once been a church. Weeds and ivy did not hide the little wheel window in the gable, or the three arched windows in the centre ; but under these last was an archway closed by an oaken door studded with iron nails, and approached by two or three steps which descended to its level. A wall on either side shut out the view of any thing beyond. The

children stopped and looked at each other; then a longing came over them to see more, and Bernard whispered—

“Shall I knock at that great door?”

“There is a rope hanging there,” whispered Miriam in reply. “I think there must be a bell.”

After a little further discussion, Bernard went boldly down the steps and pulled the rope. A bell clanged out sharply, and he retreated to Miriam’s side to watch the result of the summons. Presently a sweet voice called out—“Who is there? What do you want?” and at the same moment, a bright rosy face, with clusters of golden hair hanging round it, peeped over the wall to the left of the ruin.

“We want to see what the place is like inside of this door,” replied Bernard. “Please let us come in. We shall not do any harm.”

After a moment’s pause the face vanished, and immediately afterwards there was a sound of drawing back heavy bolts, and then the great door swung open, and showed the figure of a little girl ready to receive the new comers.

“You must be very quiet here,” she said softly, closing the door as soon as they had

stepped over the threshold. "This place was a church once, and my mother does not like me to play or make a noise in it."

Bernard and Miriam looked about them, and saw that they had entered a roofless building in the form of a cross, paved with closely cut grass. At the eastern end, where the ivy clustered, were three tall arched windows, through which the opposite side of the valley could be seen, clothed in woods of young oak. The little girl showed how, by the help of broken pillars peeping here and there above the turf, they could trace the nave of the church, and how the steps of the altar, however broken, might still be found. She showed them, in one of the corners of the transept, some of the arches of the old roof yet unbroken, and finally she led them to three low stone tombs, which she said were four hundred years old, and in which lay the dust of some of her own forefathers. It was a sweet, still place, and Bernard and Miriam listened with interest while the little girl spoke.

"My mother says it is a holy place still," she said, "though the grand hymns don't sound here any more, and the carved roof is gone, and every-

thing is ruined and broken. We like to come here in the moonlight, and she tells me what it used to be like here; and it is beautiful still, with the moonbeams falling on it, and the dark shadows lying upon the grass."

Miriam answered that she thought it was beautiful now, and then inquired of the little girl whether she lived near.

"O yes," was the reply. "Come with me and I will show you where my mother and I live," and she led them outside the ruined church through a bit of garden to a lawn on which stood a cottage. "This is my home," she continued; "mother and I and old nurse live here, and old Peter, nurse's husband, keeps the garden in order and cuts the grass. We go away sometimes to visit our relations, but in spring and summer we always stay here. My mother likes to be very quiet;" continued the little girl, while a shade passed over her bright face. "She has known many sorrows. My father was killed in battle two years ago, and my two little brothers are dead, so she has only me now. She is gone over the hill to-day to see a neighbour, and I could not go with her because there was sickness in the

house. I am glad I was at home when you came.

In answer to Miriam's questions, the little girl said there were children living over the hill with whom she often played, but always far away from the ruin, and out of hearing of her mother, lest she should be disturbed. She then showed them, just beyond the garden, a bright stream that went rattling away over the pebbles below the woody hill, and was crossed by a rude bridge that shook as the children's light feet stepped upon it. Beyond this they saw the slope clothed with oak trees and green fern, threaded by many a tempting path. But when, looking across the valley, Bernard and Miriam caught sight of the back of their own mountain, stern and bare, they bethought them that it was time to return home. The little girl went with them as far as the lawn in front of the ruin, asking hurried questions, which they could answer but briefly, about the place where they dwelt, and sundry particulars of their daily life. She was very sorry when they said they could stay no longer, and after a hasty farewell ran away across the grass. Presently, however, Miriam stopped and turned

back to the place where the little girl was still standing.

"Will you tell me," she said, "what this beautiful place is called? I shall never forget it."

"It is called the Valley of the Cross," was the reply. "My mother says there used to be a great stone cross on that mound, just above the ruin."

This time Miriam really departed, and the little girl stood watching the two receding figures across the meadows, up the turf-y slope, and along the narrow line above the rocky precipice. She clasped her hands in fear as she saw them creeping like flies along the steep hill-side, and was so absorbed in the thought of their danger, that she did not notice the approach from the other side of a lady, whose long black dress swept softly over the grass, and who said gently as she drew near—"What is it, Clara? what are you looking at?" The child started and looked round, drawing a long breath, as she pointed towards the mountain, but at that moment Bernard and Miriam turned round the farthest point of rock and were lost to sight. Clara went with her mother to sit in the bay window, and talk of the two strangers who had come by so dangerous a

path, and to repeat their account of the tower, their solitary father, old Ursula, and the dwarf.

Meantime, Bernard and Miriam reached in safety the neighbourhood of their home, climbed the wall of enclosure, and stood on the turf before the tower. No one was there; not a sound or a sign of old Ursula's return was to be perceived. This was a comfort, so far as it went, but still the children were not at ease. They did not like to look each other in the face, they had not spoken ten words since they left the Valley of the Cross. Bernard was the first to speak now.

"I can't see," he said, "why we should have been told not to go. It hasn't done us any harm."

Miriam sighed. She was not so sure that there was no harm done; for the sense of disobedience weighed upon her heart, now that the excitement of the adventure was past. She made no direct answer to Bernard's remark, but said, "It must be late, Bernard; the shadow of the opposite hill has come quite round to the left side of the tower since we went away, and the sun is very low. Mother Ursula will soon be back. Let us go and look for Cora."

"But, Miriam," said Bernard, as he followed

her down to the larch-wood, "you're not sorry you went, are you?"

"Yes, I am," she replied sadly. "It was a beautiful place, a holy place, as the little girl said, and I should like to think about it, only I am sure it was wrong to go without Mother Ursula's leave. I dare not tell her we have been there, and I never was afraid to tell her anything before."

Bernard shared her feeling, but was too proud to say so, and they walked on in silence till they reached the corner of the wood where Hacco was making his garden. The dwarf had finished his digging, and was now picking off the large stones and throwing them aside.

Little Cora, tired of watching him, had fallen asleep with her head pillowled on the old dog, and Hacco had brought a sheep-skin rug from his shed to wrap round the child and keep her warm. Now she woke as her brother and sister drew near, and looked about her with a bewildered air. Again Miriam sighed. She was afraid Cora would remember what had passed beside the enclosure wall, and she saw Bernard feared it also. Never before had they dreaded to hear little Cora speak. Miriam stooped to lift the rug.

"Come, Cora," she said, "Mother Ursula will soon be at home. Come and see if she is coming up the path;" and, nodding to Hacco, the three children went back to the main path and listened.

Yes; Ursula was coming. The steady patter of the mule's feet could already be heard, and the sound of voices now and then saying a few words. Presently Cora ran forward into Ursula's arms, and was lifted on to the sack of flour laid across the mule, and held there, that she might ride in triumph up to the door of the tower.

This ride, and the sight of the pretty pictures Ursula had brought her, banished from Cora's mind the recollection so dreaded by her brother and sister, and they went to bed feeling safe from that first danger.

The days passed on, the sweet spring days ripening into summer. The plants were thriving in Hacco's garden, the trees in the valley were heavy with foliage, and even the old grey tower had here and there a little flower or a tuft of fern peeping from its walls. Every thing in nature looked bright and beautiful, but old Ursula was not happy about her children. She could hardly tell what was the matter, or when the change had

come, but she felt they were not so gay as they had been. Miriam was graver, Bernard less obliging, less gentle with his sisters; only Cora remained the same. What could it be? Did they require more change and amusement than she could give them? Her mind was sorely troubled about them.

"Children," she said one day, "I think you may be tired of playing here within the enclosure-wall. Now you are sure-footed, you may go outside, if you will keep to the left of the tower. I can trust you not to go too far, or to run into danger. Only promise me not to go to the right. It is dangerous round there, and I should be ever fancying my lambs were in peril of their lives. You would not like to frighten and grieve poor old Ursula, so you will promise not to go, won't you?"

Miriam looked imploringly at Bernard. Many a time she had begged him to let her confess their secret, but in vain. His answers were often harsh and unkind, and she dared not offend him further. She longed now to take advantage of the opening Ursula's words afforded, and acknowledge that they had already trodden the

dangerous path. Often in her dreams she had seemed to be creeping along the hillside again, sick and giddy with the sight of the terrible precipice. She could never think of the peace and loveliness of the Valley of the Cross, for the remembrance of the fearful path that led thither, and the consciousness of her hidden fault. It would have been a blessed relief to tell all to Ursula, and the confession was on her lips when Bernard spoke.

"We will promise, Mother Ursula, if you wish it," he said, sturdily; "not that I am afraid of any path; but I don't want to frighten you." Ursula was satisfied and went her way, and the opportunity was lost to Miriam. The children took advantage of their new liberty, and soon grew familiar with many a new mountain-path, but still it seemed to Ursula that all was not right with her darlings, and she was not happy about them. One day she resolved to make another effort for their good. She had heard Bernard give a sharp answer to little Cora, and seen him push Miriam rudely aside, when she interfered to protect her little sister. This state of things must not go on; so, when the children were all

out, Ursula mounted the stairs, knocked boldly at the door of Jerome's study, and entered before he had time to ask who was there. The room was littered as usual with books; and a heap of papers fluttered to the ground as the door opened, and the summer air blew strongly in through the open window. Disturbed by the noise, Jerome looked up from his writing, and waited in surprise to know what Ursula wanted at this unusual hour.

"Master," she said, "you must forgive your faithful servant for interrupting you. It is about your children that I am come to speak to you."

"Are they ill?" he said, anxiously.

"No, master, thank God! they are well and strong. It is not that. I want to remind you, master, that Bernard is too old to be here, with only an old woman to teach him. It is time he went to school. He grows overbearing with his sisters, and needs better care than mine."

Jerome reflected for a few moments, and then said, "Look you, Ursula; you are a good woman, and there is truth in what you say; but things must remain as they are yet a little while longer. I came here that I might finish a great work. It is

nearly done. By the autumn the last pages will be completed, and Jerome Fauster will not have lived in vain. Then I shall be free, and I will do all you wish; at present I cannot make any change. Do as well as you can with the children, and leave me in quiet to finish my work."

He bent over his writing again, and Ursula picked up the scattered papers, laid them carefully by, and went down stairs very grave and thoughtful. There was no help for it. She must wait for the autumn. The only thing she could do was to ask the old priest, who sometimes came up to the tower, to give Bernard good advice; but though the boy took it with tolerable patience, he did not make much effort to follow it.

So the summer passed away, and the larches and oaks once more were yellow; and then came the autumn gales swirling down from the bleak mountain-tops, and tearing off the dead and dying leaves till every bough was bare. Again Hacco came to the fireside in the evenings, and wove baskets, and enjoyed the blaze. Again he and the golden Lion slept beside the hearth. Again Ursula and the little girls knitted warm stockings for the family, and sang old ballads in

the long evenings. Winter was drawing near, yet Jerome still laboured at his great work, up among the brazen instruments and heaps of books in his lonely study. Ursula feared for his health, for he seldom left the tower now, and even at night she heard him moving overhead to throw logs on his fire, or seek for some book that he wished to consult. She thought he looked thinner and paler and more careworn than ever, but she could not venture to say so, and waited as patiently as she could, till he should be able to attend to his children. Late one afternoon, when she had opened the door to call the little ones in from their play, Jerome came down stairs and stood beside her, drawing a long breath, as if the fresh air revived and cheered him.

"Give me joy, Ursula," he said presently, turning to her with a strange smile; "I have finished my work. The last word is written and done!"

"I am glad, master—very, very glad," she answered.

"So am I, I believe," he said, thoughtfully; "but it is like parting with a dear friend. How am I to live from day to day without it?"

"Live for your children, Master," Ursula said with eagerness; "live for the little motherless ones, who sorely need you."

"Ah, yes! I promised to settle about sending Bernard to school. We will see to-morrow, Ursula. I must go now to one of my boyish haunts. I shall be home by supper-time."

It was not till afterwards that Ursula remembered he had turned to the right as he left her. Meantime she called the children in, swept the hearth, lighted the lamp, and settled to her usual evening's employments. By and bye it was time to give the young ones their supper, and she put aside Jerome's portion to keep it hot. Then came Hacco and his dog, but the minutes passed on, and still the master did not return. An hour, two hours, went by, and Ursula began to grow uneasy. She opened the door and stepped out, listening intently. There was a sound of waterfalls and a low moaning of the wind, nothing more; and a heavy mist was creeping up from the valley and wrapping itself about the hills. Ursula went in-doors again, touched Hacco on the arm, and when he looked up, spoke rapidly with her fingers. He understood her trouble at

once, threw aside his employment, and signed to her that he would go and seek his master. Lion rose from his warm corner with a yawn and prepared to follow. Ursula stopped them till she had fetched a flask of wine and some bread, which she put in a knapsack and strapped it over the dwarf's shoulders, then she went to the door to see them off. As she did so, she suddenly recollected that Jerome had turned to the right towards the dangerous path, and her heart sank with fear. She would not tell the children the terrible thought that had come into her mind, but she pointed the way to Hacco, and with eager signs besought him to be careful. He smiled and nodded, and she stood watching till the mist wrapt him from her sight, and then turned away with a muttered prayer for his safety and success. Close beside her she found Bernard standing; he had seen in which direction Hacco went, and looking up at Ursula with a face white with alarm, he exclaimed—

“O mother Ursula! is my father gone there?”

She took the little boy by the hand, closed the door, and returned to the fireside.

“Yes, Bernard, he is gone by the dangerous

path I told you to avoid. It is a fearful way, and if the mist came upon him there, God knows what may happen!" Ursula's voice shook, and tears blinded her as she spoke. In a moment Miriam and Bernard were on their knees beside her, hiding their faces in her lap, while Miriam's whole frame was shaken with sobs.

"I ought not to have said it. I should not have frightened you, my darlings," continued Ursula, laying her hands gently on their heads. "Don't cry, Miriam. He may be waiting in safety till the mist clears away."

"It is not *that*, mother Ursula," Bernard cried, lifting his head. "Miriam wanted to tell you a long time ago, but I never would let her. It was all my fault, mother Ursula; I made Miriam go along that path."

"You went there, my children?" exclaimed Ursula; "you went along the path by the precipice?"

"Yes," Miriam replied, now venturing to look up; "we went one day in the spring, to the Valley of the Cross. Do forgive us, mother Ursula. I have been so unhappy!" and again the weeping face was hidden. Ursula's grieved looks were

punishment enough, even without the words, "I thought I could trust you," which burst, almost without her knowledge, from her lips. The whole story was now told, and forgiveness freely given to the penitent children. Ursula was sure they would never do so again.

"Poor motherless children!" she said to herself when she had laid them all in their beds, and was sitting up watching for her master's return. "Surely I must have been harder with them than I meant to be, or they would never have been afraid to tell me they had done wrong."

The night wore on. Many a time Ursula opened the door and listened, but the mist was thicker than ever, and not a sound of human step or voice came to her ear. She heaped logs on the fire, trimmed the lamp, and sat down with her knitting, determined to watch all the night long, if necessary, and thinking anxiously and fearfully of what might be her master's fate. The little ones were soon asleep, grief and fear alike forgotten, and Ursula watched and listened alone.

The dreary hours rolled on in unbroken silence, except when she herself moved to re-

plenish the fire or look out into the darkness. By and bye the faint grey light came creeping through the mist ; the wind rose, and gradually the vapours rolled aside, and the far hills might be dimly seen against the sky. Ursula went out once more to look and listen, and presently her strained ear caught a faint sound very far off. Nearer and nearer it came—a sound of feet treading the path that wound upward from the valley. Could they be bringing news of the master that way ? She went to the edge of the hill and looked over. Hacco and a man she did not know were carrying a rude litter, on which lay stretched, pale and senseless, the figure of Jerome Fauster. Ursula thought the worst had happened, and that her little ones were orphans indeed ; but she kept down her trouble, and motioned to the men to come into the tower. She lifted the sleeping Bernard from his bed, carried him upstairs, and laid him down so softly as scarcely to disturb his sleep ; then she helped to place Jerome on Bernard's bed, and began trying to restore him to life. She felt that his heart still beat, so she hoped he would recover, but he looked like one dead.

"How was it? Where did you find him?" she asked, glancing at the man who had helped Hacco to carry the litter.

"I was half asleep this morning at dawn, mistress," he said, "when I heard a knocking at the door of the outhouse where I sleep, down in the Valley of the Cross. It was of no use to call out, so I got up and went to the door, and there I found this poor fellow here," pointing to Hacco. "As you know, he could not tell me what he wanted in words, but I soon found I must go with him, and so I did. He was shivering with cold, and had but little clothes upon him, so I lent him some of mine. He took me to where this gentleman lay all in a heap under the cliff, having fallen, as it seemed, from the narrow path above; and no wonder, for the fog was so thick we had a hard matter to find our way. This poor soul here had stripped himself of his warm clothing to cover his master. I fetched a litter, and we brought the gentleman up by the other side of the mountain, the dwarf showing the way. Shall I fetch the doctor for you, mistress?"

Ursula thanked him warmly, and would have given him money; but he refused, and took his

departure. Ursula continued to chafe Jerome's hands and bathe his forehead, but he remained insensible, and she noticed presently that Hacco still stood near, shivering from head to foot. She rose and led him to the fire, offering him some of the warm soup she had kept ready all night. He drank it, and looked gratefully at her; then told her on his fingers how he had sought all night for his master, and found him at last with Lion's help; how he had covered Jerome with his coat, and sat near him till dawn, and then found his way to a farm for help. Jerome had shown no sign of life from the time Hacco found him. Ursula bade the poor dwarf rest, and took her place by Jerome. By and bye the doctor came, looking very grave when he examined his patient, for the hurt was very serious, and it was doubtful whether Jerome would ever wake from his swoon.

When Ursula stood by the children's bed a few hours later, she looked so grave and sad that they knew there was bad news of their father. They moved about with hushed voices and soft steps, scarcely daring to ask what had happened. She told them, however, as gently as she could, and a short time afterwards Jerome opened his

eyes and spoke a few words that showed he knew where he was and who were near him. In a few days his real state was known. He had received an injury which would probably make him a life-long invalid; for months he must lie still and be waited upon like an infant, but he would probably live on, and after a time be free from pain. All this the doctor said to Ursula, and when he was gone, Jerome insisted on its being repeated to him. He turned paler than ever while he listened, then looking up with a smile, said—

“Never mind, Ursula. Thank God! I have finished my great work!”

But there was yet a greater work for Jerome to do. He had to learn to bear patiently long days and weeks and months of confinement to his bed and constrained idleness—restlessness of body and mind, without the power of employing either. He had to learn to submit his human will to God’s divine will—a harder work than any he had yet striven to accomplish.

The children’s lives were much changed now. The father, whom they used scarcely to see, was now always among them, for he could not be moved from the place where he had first been

laid after his accident, and Bernard now slept on the couch in the upper chamber among the great brazen instruments and piles of books. Ursula had plenty of work upon her hands; but the little ones helped her as much as they could, and soon became very handy in waiting upon their father. He liked to have them round him. Hitherto he had never taken much notice of any children. He had believed a child to be an animal far less amusing than a dog or a kitten, and much more mischievous, and he was surprised to find how thoughtful even Bernard could be, and how sensibly all the three would answer when he was well enough to talk to them. For their parts, they became less and less shy with him; and in the long winter evenings, when his bed was drawn to the fireside, they would ask him questions that led to his telling them wonderful things from the stores of knowledge laid up in his brain; things that sometimes kept Bernard awake thinking, when the stars twinkled in the frosty air, or the moon peeped into his lofty chamber. The faithful Hacco took charge of the invalid at night, with a string tied round his own and his master's wrist, that he might be easily wakened if required;

and Lion lay across the doorway, solemnly undertaking the guardianship of the whole family.

The winter proved a very severe one, and the path up the mountain was often impassable for days together. Now and then the old priest made his way to the tower, and cheered all the dwellers there by his kind words, but Ursula was seldom able to take the children to the church in the valley. The little girls were tender and delicate, and they could not bear exposure to the biting cold ; but Bernard braved it well, and did much to help Hacco, breaking the ice on the pool, and bringing the great frozen lumps to melt by the fire, sawing wood for fuel, and bringing fag-gots up from the larch-wood. The poor dwarf had never been the same, since the night of his master's accident. Perhaps the exposure to the damp chill air, when he had stripped himself of his coat to cover Jerome, or the violent effort of carrying the litter up the steep, had done him harm. He would not complain, and went about his work as usual ; but Ursula saw that he was weak and often weary, and she tried to spare him as much as she could, and set aside many a portion of soup or hot porridge for him to eat in the chimney-

corner when he came home from tending his goats.

The family at the tower kept Christmas as cheerfully as they could. Jerome was still very helpless, but he no longer suffered pain. There was snow everywhere, in the valley as well as on the hills; but the path was open, and Ursula, leaving Hacco and little Cora to attend to Jerome, took Bernard and Miriam to the church in the valley. The mule-driver came to meet them, his mule decked with brightly-coloured tassels and ribbons, and with feet rough-shod to prevent any accident on the snow, which was frozen hard and smooth as glass, and glistened in the sunshine with dazzling brightness. The bells sounded sweetly in the still air as the party went down the hill; and when they reached the village they saw crowds of people trooping to church. Everything was bright and gay. The houses were adorned with green boughs and coloured streamers, and the church itself was like a bower, with wreaths of green leaves and scarlet berries wound about its pillars and hung on its walls. Bernard and Miriam joined in the Christmas hymn with the rest, and in the prayers and thanksgivings; and

listened attentively while the priest told the people why they should rejoice on the Lord's birth-day, and why the joy of that day gave brightness to the birth-day of every child that was born into the world. When they reached the tower again, they found that Hacco had woven a wreath of glossy ivy leaves and black berries to hang over the door, and decked the room within with green boughs in honour of the day ; and when dinner was ready, the dwarf produced with pride some potatoes grown in his garden, and served in a bowl carved by his own hand, with a pretty device of fern-leaves and grass. He had his reward in the delight of the children.

Jerome watched all that passed with an amused smile, and often joined in the merriment around him. When the evening was closing in, and Ursula had drawn the curtains and bidden Hacco heap fresh logs on the fire, he suddenly said, "By the way, Ursula, what has become of my great work all this time ?"

"I don't know anything about it, Master," she replied ; "what is it like?"

"Like!" he repeated, laughing ; "why, like a heap of waste paper to you, Ursula, such as you

would like to burn when the logs won't light up kindly in the morning, but precious as the apple of my eye to me, so I hope you'll spare them. They are tied together with a red string, and laid just within my desk. Will you fetch them?"

Ursula lighted a small lamp, and went up the winding stair, bidding Bernard follow her.

"You shall carry the papers," she said to the boy, as she took the packet from his father's desk. "May-be they're precious as gold, and one day you'll like to think you had them in your hand."

Bernard carried them to his father, who patted the boy's head as he took them from him and said, "Who knows, Bernard, but you may be proud some day to call yourself Jerome Fauster's son?"

"I am proud of it now," Bernard said sturdily; and Ursula smiled and whispered that he was a good child. Jerome held the packet in his hand.

"I will not untie the string," he said, presently. "I have done my best. This is the fruit of my life's labour, and it shall go forth to the world as it is. Let it go, Ursula, and let us be content with whatever comes of it, praise or blame, belief or

scorn. Bring me paper and wax, and let me pack up my treasure with my own poor hands ; then give me pen and ink to write the address, and to-morrow let Hacco take it down to the post-master, and it will be sent away, like some little boat that leaves the shore and wanders out on the great, wide, boundless sea. Will it be wrecked and sunk, or will it come back with a precious freight ?”

Ursula could not answer, for she did not in the least understand what he meant ; but she brought him all the things he had asked for, and he made up his parcel and gave it into her care. To her, a bundle of papers, with many a blot, did not appear, in spite of her speech to Bernard, likely to be of much service either to her master and his children, or to the world in general ; however, they should be sent as desired, and if ever any good came of them, so much the better. Then they all drew closer round the fire, and sang old songs and carols, in which Jerome now and then joined, and after supper he told them stories of his own childhood, when he wandered among the hills and was light of foot as the mountain-goat. It was a pleasant evening, and Bernard at last went singing upstairs to his lofty

chamber. He would never forget this Christmas day so long as he lived.

As time passed on, it was found that Jerome's hurt was far less serious than had been supposed at first, and it was believed that when spring came he would be able to walk again. Meantime Ursula had no further trouble about the children's lessons, for it was their father's delight to hear them read, and to teach them such things as he thought they could understand. They liked to cluster round his bed, and listen to him, when he tried to put into simple words some of the learning with which his own mind was stored. Still Ursula longed for the spring. She did not like to trouble Jerome about her anxieties, but she thought Hacco grew weaker, and his work was almost too much for his strength.

"You must help Hacco as much as you can, Bernard," she said one day, when out of Jerome's hearing. "I do not think the poor fellow is strong, and I am sure he often suffers."

Little Cora overheard the words, and they filled her with pity for the poor dwarf. She and Miriam were fond of him, and had knitted warm stockings for him quite early in the winter, there-

by calling forth an uncouth show of wonder and thankfulness; and now Cora longed to let him know she was sorry for his pain and weakness. She would go near him in the evening when he was resting on his settle by the fire, not busy with his carving or basket-making as of old, but listless and weary, with his blue eyes fixed on the blaze; and, nestling down beside him, would pat his rough cheek with her tender little hand, or coax him to look at pictures with her. The book of sacred pictures was the one he liked best, for among them was that which Ursula had once shown him, of the great Physician who healed the sick, and "made the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

The lingering spring came at last, and once more the snow melted from the mountains, and the valleys were bright with leaves and blossoms. Jerome was already beginning to try his strength and move slowly and cautiously across the room. There was little doubt that he would soon be well, but it would be long before he could walk upstairs, and he still occupied Bernard's bed, while the boy slept in the upper chamber. Hacco again brought his goats up the hill, instead of

milking them in the shed as he had done in the winter; but he moved slowly as he mounted the steep path from the larch-wood, and if the goats strayed, it was not he but Bernard who chased them home again.

One morning, about this time, a stranger came up the path from the valley and stopped before the tower. Ursula saw him first, and came out to ask his business. She saw that he looked like one who had travelled far, and that he carried a letter in his hand.

"I am come in search of Master Jerome Fauster, the great astronomer," said the stranger, in reply to Ursula's question. "They told me in the valley that he was living up here."

"He is here within," said Ursula, inviting the stranger to enter; and as he did so, he saw Jerome lying on his couch, slate in hand, giving a lesson in numbers to his three children. The stranger took off his cap respectfully as he came near, and Jerome looked up and begged to be excused for not rising, as he was still an invalid.

"I am the bearer of a letter which will tell its own tale," said the stranger, handing Jerome a folded paper with a huge seal upon it. Little

Cora was ready to cry. There was something so solemn in the whole scene, it reminded her of stories she had heard of people receiving their death-warrants in prison, and she was afraid there might be bad news for her father. He, however, broke the seal, and his face grew very bright as he read the letter.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, "you have brought me good news, sir. The king is very gracious to me. Ursula"—and he turned to the good old nurse who was anxiously looking on—"Ursula, it is well you did not light your fire with the blotted papers. My little boat has come back to land with a goodly freight! In plain words, the king has sent me a noble appointment in the city that was so long my home, and all because he has read the contents of the packet which Bernard brought downstairs to me on Christmas night."

By degrees the children understood that their father was now known and acknowledged to be one of the most learned men in the land, and that he was to be made Professor in the college, whose dark walls they used to pass when they lived in the city. They knew they must leave the tower

on the mountain for a very different home, and this grieved them, for they had begun to love the old place and to enjoy the life they led there. Ursula's cares were lightened, for the master would now be able to provide for his children. Bernard would go to the college, and the little girls would be taught all that ladies ought to learn. The little ones tried to explain to Hacco all the changes that were coming, but the only thing they could make him understand was, that they were going away from the tower, and this thought made his great blue eyes fill with tears. In vain they added that wherever they went he and Lion must go also. He only shook his head sadly and pointed down to the valley, as if he would say that he could not leave the place where his old master lay. The preparations Ursula was making for departure increased Hacco's grief, and she knew not how to comfort him. Little Cora succeeded best with her simple, loving ways, and it was only when near her that his face wore any of its former brightness.

Bernard and Miriam were very open and fearless with their father now, and they one day even confessed to him their visit to the Valley of the

Cross. He shuddered when he learnt that they had ventured twice along the dangerous path by the precipice, and thanked God for their escape.

"I used to go there often as a boy," he added, "and down to the ruined church; but I had never been there since I came back, till that evening when I fell. My task being finished, I had a longing to go and look at the old place, and the mist came upon me suddenly as I crept along the narrowest part of the way. I think the path broke away and fell with me. I only remember feeling I was going—and then a horrible crash—and no more, till I opened my eyes here in this room."

Ursula had promised to take Bernard and Miriam by the safer way to the Valley of the Cross once more; and one bright day they set forth, Bernard astride on the mule, and his sister on a cushion behind him, with her arms clasped round his waist. The path that wound round the eastern side of the mountain was much longer than the one by the precipice, and old Ursula was glad to stop and rest several times by the way; but at length the party stood before the great door of the ruin, and the mule-driver pulled at

the rope and made the bell ring out loudly. The children looked up, expecting to see the bright face peep over the wall, but there was no sign of it; only the bolts were drawn back and the door swung open by a grey-headed man, who bade them enter. Ursula lifted the children from the mule and went in with them. The old man, who was Peter the gardener, had been mowing the grass, and was now sweeping it into heaps; and near him, busily loading a little cart with the scented grass, was the little girl with the rosy face and golden hair, whom Bernard and Miriam had seen long ago. She stopped in the very act of lifting an armful of grass, shook back her loose locks, and fixed her eyes on the new comers, whom she instantly recognised. Dropping her load, she went forward and gave them welcome.

“We are going far, far away,” said Miriam, “and we wanted to see you once more.”

“You did not come by that dreadful path, did you?” asked the little girl. “Some one fell down there last autumn. It was after my mother and I were gone away, but Peter told us a poor dwarf came and fetched him to carry the gentleman home to a tower on the mountain. I was

afraid it must be your father that fell down, was it?"

Miriam told her the story, while Bernard shook hands with Peter, and Ursula thanked the old man for the help he had given her master. Then the little girl took the children and Ursula to see her mother, and that pale grave lady spoke kindly to them, and made them rest and take some food in her pretty cottage. By and bye Bernard was again lifted on the mule, with his sister behind him, and they rode slowly away, often looking back to the place where the little girl and her mother still stood, waving their hands in sign of farewell, till a turn of the path shut out from their sight for ever the peaceful Valley of the Cross.

The time of departure was very near. First came strange men from a distance and carried off, with extreme care, Jerome's brazen instruments and precious books to his new home. Then some of the furniture was to go, but the good priest begged hard that Jerome and his children would come to his house in the valley for a few days, while Ursula made her arrangements and packed the goods for removal; and this

plan was agreed to. All this time poor Hacco drooped more and more. To all the little ones could say in the finger-language, which even Cora now understood well, and to all Ursula's attempts to cheer him, he only replied by a sad smile and shake of the head, or by pointing down to the valley. One thing he made quite clear to them, and that was his determination not to go away from his old home. Ursula consulted her master upon the subject, and Jerome replied, "If you find him still so determined when we are gone down to the valley, leave such things as will make him comfortable in the lowest room of the tower, and let him keep his dog and his goats, and I will give our good friend the priest money to supply him with anything he needs, so long as the poor faithful creature lives."

It was on a lovely day in early summer that the family left the home that had sheltered them for nearly two years. They stood some time on the platform before it, sad and silent in spite of all their bright hopes. Nothing was moving in the blue sky, except one great eagle, that now and then swept downward towards the slopes where white flocks were scattered over the tender green.

Not a cloud hung over the hill-tops, and the tower itself was flooded with sunshine. Jerome gave a long, lingering look all round, and then called to his children to come away, and mounted a mule that was waiting for him, for he could not yet walk down the steep. Ursula came out and lifted Bernard on a second mule, which was led by their old friend the mule-driver. Miriam sat behind her brother, for the little girls had now outgrown their panniers; and Cora was to go down in Ursula's arms. Hacco stood leaning against the door-post, with large tears rolling down his cheeks. Little Cora took his hand to try to comfort him, and put up her face for a kiss. The poor dwarf sank down on the door-step, hiding his face, and Ursula took Cora in her arms and carried her away, the child crying bitterly at thought of Hacco's grief.

"I shall go back to him to-morrow morning, my lamb," said Ursula, soothing her; "I told poor Hacco I was coming back in the morning, and I'll tell him to come down to the valley and see my little Cora." The priest received his guests kindly, and even Cora soon grew cheerful and amused with the strangeness of everything round her.

Early the next morning Ursula returned to the mountain, to prepare the furniture to be brought away. All was quiet about the tower as she drew near, and the door was still closed.

“ Hacco sleeps late in his sorrow, poor fellow,” she said to herself, taking from her pocket a little loaf that the children had sent for his breakfast, and rejoicing in the thought of the pleasure which their kind attention would give him. She knocked at the door, and was answered only by a low growl from the mastiff.

“ How foolish I am,” she said, laughing; “ Hacco can’t hear a knock;” so she tried the door, and found it was not locked or barred, but opened to her touch. Yet she could not enter, for Hacco had drawn his bed across the doorway, so as to defend the entrance; and there he lay, with Lion on the floor on the other side of him. The dog looked up into Ursula’s face and whined; there was grief in his eyes. She began to tremble, she knew not why; but seeing the dwarf still slept, she laid her hand on his arm to waken him, and leaned forward so that she could see his face. Then she trembled more and more, for she saw that the poor dwarf slept the sleep from which in

this world there could be no more awakening. Poor faithful Hacco was dead.

Ursula closed the door, leaving Lion to keep watch, and went sorrowfully down the mountain to tell her master what had happened, and to break the news to the children as gently as she could. Jerome was touched to the heart, and the little ones were loud in their grief. Ursula had expected such an event, but not so soon, or she would not have left the poor dwarf to meet death with only his faithful dog beside him. Good old Lion was a greater pet than ever now, and he was to go away to the city with the children. Before many days, the poor dwarf was buried beside his old master; and Jerome ordered that on the white cross at the head of his grave should be inscribed the words, "Hacco, a good and faithful servant." And now it was time to say farewell to the old priest, with whom the white goat was left in remembrance of Hacco, while the others of the flock were distributed among the poor. All Ursula's work was done at the tower, and the old place was left to solitude and decay. When they lost sight of the good priest, who stood bareheaded at his door to watch them go, the children fixed their

eyes on their old home till the road, turning away into another valley, hid it from their view; and soon their thoughts were busy with the new scenes to which they were hastening.

This is the real story of Jerome Fauster, and how he left the tower on the mountain. He lived long in the city, and his children had children of their own before he was taken from among them. He was honoured in his lifetime, and his bronze statue was set up in the market-place when he died.



THE FORTUNES OF MIKE LACY.



BOUT a hundred years ago, a youth named Phil Murphy determined to leave Ireland, and emigrate to America. Several reasons induced him to decide on this step. He was one of a large family, and his father's cabin was very small ; he liked good fare, and the supply even of potatoes was often scanty ; he had no love for digging, and was too young and strong to beg. Moreover, he had heard wonderful tales of the wealth and comfort of the lands beyond sea, and he longed for a share of both ; so, with golden visions of the future luring him on, he took leave of his ragged parents and barefooted brothers and sisters, and turned his back on the hovel that had sheltered his infancy, with a small bundle in one hand, and a stout thorn-stick in the other.

"Good-bye, me boy," said his father; "niver forget the onld countrry. Whin ye're a great rich man, send us word, and think no scorn of the place where ye were reared."

"And Phil, darlin'," added his weeping mother, "don't forget yer prayers. Night and day the ould mother 'll be prayin' for ye here."

Phil made many promises, and walked away with a heavy heart, stopping at the top of the hill to take a last look of his home, and wave a farewell to his mother, who still stood crying on the doorstep, with a troop of wild-looking children round her. He turned away at last with tears in his own eyes, vowing that when the days of riches and grandeur came, his mother should sit on an arm-chair in the chimney-corner like any queen, and not do another day's work so long as she lived.

Phil's golden dreams were never realised, and never again did he see his mother's face. In his ignorance, he took passage in a vessel bound for Newfoundland; and after a three weeks' passage in rough weather, he arrived in sight of that island. The barren, rock-bound coast was very unlike the Eden his imagination had pictured; but he had

suffered so many miseries at sea, that he was thankful to get on shore at any price, and he had no inclination at present for another long voyage, such as would carry him to a fairer land and milder climate. At the age of ninety-two, Phil Murphy was still alive, and still a dweller in Newfoundland, a hale old man, but quite blind. His was a long life, with few events to disturb its quiet course. He married rather late, and his wife, twenty years younger than himself, was the tender attendant on his old age. Of the six children that had been born to him, none were near him now. One son was a settler in Canada, another a clerk in New York; the third had become an artilleryman, and was on the other side of the globe; and the fourth was a sailor on board a man-of-war on a distant station. One daughter had gone with her husband home to the old country, and the youngest and dearest of all had for years been in her grave. Yet the old couple were not quite alone in their poor home. A grandson, Michael or Mike Lacy, the orphan child of their dead daughter, brightened their lives with his merriment and affection, and was the darling and joy of their hearts.

Very unlike an English village was the little seaside settlement in which old Phil Murphy had made his home. A dozen or two of wooden houses, or tilts, as they are called, were scattered here and there on an uneven ledge of rocks, below which steep cliffs sank abruptly to the sea; while at the back, the land rose into lofty hills clothed in dwarf woods of fir and birch trees. In a sheltered nook, just protected by an arm of the hill on one side and a lump of rock on the other, was perched a little chapel, to which the congregation was summoned at certain times, not by a bell, but by a flag hoisted on a pole that had been reared on the highest point, so as to be visible from the few dwellings on the wild shores of the bay that trended away to the right and left. Beside the chapel was a schoolhouse, where twenty or thirty children learned to read and write. No clergyman resided within ten miles of the place, so that the services at the chapel were only occasional; and the hoisting of the flag on a fine summer's day, was the signal for many a boat to come across the water from distant points of the coast, and from an island, on which was a *group of fishing-huts*, not far away.

The largest house was the inn, where, in summer-time, parties from the town of St. Johns sometimes stopped to put up their carriages while they rambled over the hills; or where, even in winter, the best room was occasionally required for parties who came in sleighs, and brought luncheon with them, or were satisfied with the dried salmon or ham and eggs which the house afforded. The innkeeper also kept a provision and clothing store, and was in all ways the great man of the place: owning a cart in which he frequently visited the town to fetch goods for sale, and being also the possessor of three or four fishing-boats, and several stages whereon cod-fish were dried.

Old Phil Murphy's cottage was but a small place, not much larger than the hovel in Ireland, which had sheltered his infancy; but his wife, who was an Englishwoman, had a taste for cleanliness and comfort, and made the dwelling look its best. There was one tolerably large room, with a wide chimney having seats on each side, whence, looking upward through the smoke, one might get a glimpse of the sky and the stars. Under each of these seats was a hencoop for

winter use, according to the common custom of the country. From the principal room, a door led into the small chamber where the old people slept, and besides this there was no more accommodation, except a lumber-closet and a shed for wood. Mike spread his bed at night in the house-place, summer and winter alike.

One fine day in July, when sea and sky were equally blue, Mike Lacy, a curly-headed boy of twelve years old, tempted his old grandfather to come and sit in a sheltered nook among the rocks, and enjoy the warm sunshine.

“There, grandfather,” said the boy, when the old man was settled; “a’n’t you glad you came out? It’s a pity to sit in the chimney-corner such a day as this is.”

The old man smiled as he answered—

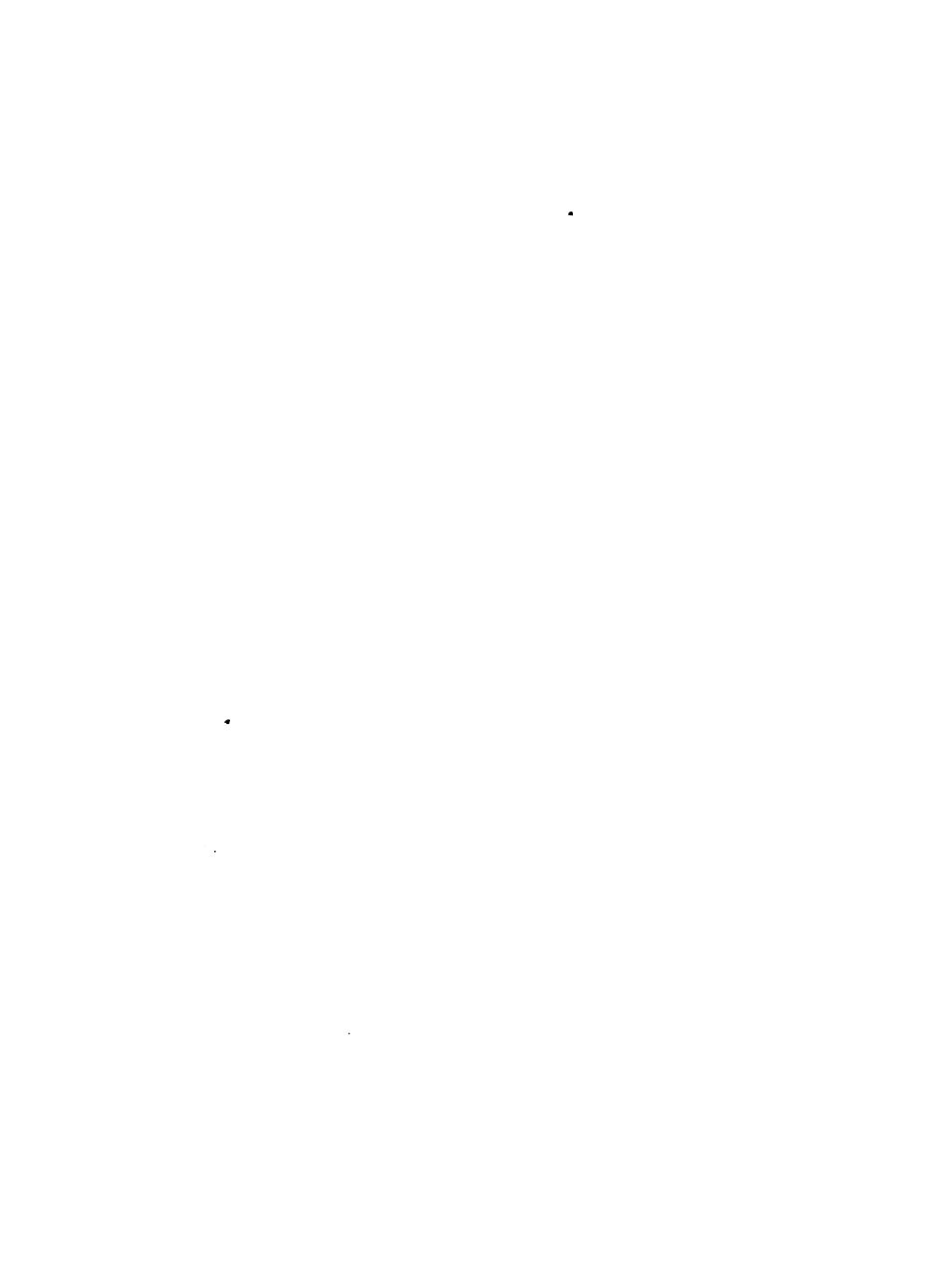
“The sun warms me, Mike, and so does the fire, and I can’t see either the one or the other. But I like this place, boy; I like to hear the water washing the cliffs down below—the old sound that I’ve been used to hear all my life.”

Mike looked out over the bay dotted with fishing-boats, and then at the old man’s sightless eyes. He could not talk about beautiful scenery,



MIKE LACY AND HIS GRANDFATHER.

Page 02.



nor understand why the sight of it gave him pleasure; but he felt strongly at that moment that it was a misfortune to be blind.

"All the boats must be out," continued the old man. "How is it that Mr. Scanlan didn't want ye to-day, Mike?"

"There was no room for me," the boy answered, with a sigh. "There were men enough to fill all the boats to-day, so Mr. Scanlan said I must wait till next time. It was hard work yesterday to pull in the lines fast enough, and get them baited again. We never stopped hauling a minute all the day, grandfather; and in our boat we caught eight hundred fish, prime ones as ever you saw."

"Good news for the poor, Mike. I always liked the cod-fishery best, though in my young days I was a ready hand for the sealing too. But we've had good reason to remember the dangers of the seal-fishery, Mike," continued the old man, sighing.

"Yes, I know," answered the boy; "it was going after the seals that my father was drowned. Grannie never likes me to ask about it; will you tell me how it happened, grandfather?" The old

man laid his thin hand on the boy's head, as he replied—

“ Your grandmother doesn't like to think of that time, Mike. Don't ask her any more, and I'll tell you all I can. Your father, Pat Lacy, was a fine lad with a blithe step and a laughing eye, when he married our darlin' Margaret. Ah, but she was the beauty! not one of 'em all was like our Margaret. We lived at St. Johns then, and the Lacy's had a cabin close by, so we saw them every day; and by and bye, when you came into the world, grannie would run in whenever she got a chance, just to dandle the baby, and help our pretty Margaret. You were but six months old when the time came round for the sealers to go out, and Pat and my son Mike Murphy were to go in the same brig. The winter had been a bitterly cold one, and the harbour was all frozen over, so that they had to cut the ice with saws to make a passage for the vessels to get out. The weather was bright and fine, and they all worked with a will; so one day in March, everything was ready, and a fleet of sealers went out together, flags flying, guns firing, and crowds to see them go, all cheerin' till they were hoarse.

You'll see St. Johns one day, Mike. The harbour there is long and narrow, with the town on the north shore, sloping upwards. Just at the south-east corner there's a passage they call the Narrows, between high hills out into the open sea. The ice was firm all the way out to the end of the Narrows ; but the wind helped the men as they hauled at the ropes, to drag the vessels through the channel, and the harbour was soon clear of them all.

" Grannie and I took our Margaret, with her baby (that was you, Mike), to live with us while her husband was gone. There was our son Mike's little bed-place for her, and grannie thought it would be better for her than frettin' her poor heart out alone. Pat brought her over in the mornin' before he went aboard the brig. I don't know how it was, but she seemed dazed-like, and hardly spoke when he rattled on about the fine time they'd have, and the big purse of money he'd get for her before the summer was ended. She just looked, looked at him, as if she only half knew what he said, only she held his hand tight, and wouldn't let him go. Her mother went and took the baby from her. 'Come, Margaret,' she said, 'never

let them lay blame to Pat for being behind his time. Give him a kiss, and let him go.' Then she was up in a minute clingin' to his neck, with one or two big, heavy sobs. 'God bless you, little woman,' says Pat; 'it is but for a little while;' and he put her gently down in her chair, and went out. Grannie laid the baby in her arms, and Margaret cried quietly for awhile, and then wiped her eyes, and went out in front of the cabin, and watched the vessels going out. I could see her from the ice down below, and grannie stood beside her; but before the brig got out of the channel, Margaret went into the house and shut the door. My son told me long after, that he heard Pat mutter to himself, 'She can't look at us, the darlin'," as he lost sight of her; and then he went about his work more willin' and eager than any of 'em.

"That was a grand year for the seals!" continued the old man. "Some of the vessels came in within a month, with heavy cargoes of five and six thousand pelts, and unloaded and went out again for more. Pat's vessel was not one of these, but we knew she had been seen in the middle of April, all hands well, and three thousand pelts on

board, so we expected her at the end of the month. There's a path along the hillside towards the mouth of the harbour, leading to a rock they call the Chain-rock, because, in the war time, a chain was fastened to it, to be stretched across the Narrows, if the enemy came. When you go to St. Johns, Mike, tell them to show you that path among the stones. You'll see a niche in the hillside, just above the Chain-rock, and a flat bit of stone that looks as if it was meant for a seat. Many and many a time that spring, a little grey figure, with a baby in her arms, stole along that stony path through the snow, and sat by the hour in the shelter, with her weary eyes lookin' out over the sea. It was our pretty Margaret, wearyin' for her husband. She never complained, or troubled any body, but she grew very still in her ways, and had a look like one that feels sorrow a little way off. Grannie used to follow her out to the rock, and coax her home again, tellin' her the cold would hurt the baby, and then she would get up and sigh and come away. It was no use to tell her she was makin' a trouble before there was need: we'd had good news of Pat, and he'd be home in no time at all. She wouldn't

argue with us, but only gave a sad smile, and went back to her look-out place. She wasn't there, though, when the brig came in. One mornin' early, when Grannie was layin' out the breakfast, and Margaret had just put her crowin' baby into my arms, my son Mike opened the door and came in, as white as a sheet, and shakin' from head to foot. Grannie gave a cry and ran to him, but Margaret stood as if she had been turned into stone. I called out to him to know where was Pat, but he never answered, only flung himself on a settle, and covered up his face and sobbed. Then Margaret moved up close to him, and laid her poor little hand on his arm. 'Where did he die?' she said, quite calm and steady; 'tell me where it was.' The shock of seeing her like that, made Mike give over sobbing, and he told us all that he knew. Sure enough, Pat was dead and gone a month and more. One night in April the brig got hampered in the ice, and the men jumped overboard with gaffs and pokers to clear a way for her. It was starlight when they began, and they could see well enough, but by and bye the clouds got up, and a fog came on, and word was given for all to come aboard. The captain called out the

names as they came on deck, but Pat Lacy was missing. He must have slipped off unawares, and they never saw sign of him again. They did all they could, but it was no use ; they couldn't get him back from that cold hungry sea that was moanin' about the ice. That was the end of your father, Mike, a fine brave fellow as ever stepped."

Mike was silent for awhile, thinking of the lonely ship among the ice, with fog around her and darkness overhead, and the poor sailor sinking unseen in the dreary waters.

"Thank you, grandfather," he said, at length. "It was a sad way to die, and a sad story for poor mother to hear. Tell me about her."

"There's not much to tell," replied the old man, with a voice that trembled slightly. "Her sorrow was very quiet, and we seldom saw her cry. But she used to steal away to her old seat on the stone, where she'd sat so often in spring, and look out over the sea, as she rocked her baby to sleep. The Governor's lady, that was then, found her there one day, and talked to her and admired the baby ; and after that, she used to go up to Government House to do needlework, as

they said; but I believe the young ladies liked to play with the child, and they all felt a pity for our Margaret. She lived with us always now, for my son Mike went away to be a man-of-war's man, and Margaret had his little berth in the tilt. You used to come back rigged out in all manner of fine things that the ladies made for you, my boy, but never a bit did our Margaret cheer up. Grannie fretted to see her so sad and wasted, and asked me to move away from St. Johns, to try if a new place would do better; so, next fall, we came hither. It was no use, Mike, for the heart of her was broken."

The old man ceased to speak, and Mike sat silently at his feet, looking out over the sea, now so blue and sunny, and thinking of the tale he had heard. Then he began to wonder what his own life would be. Was he to be a fisherman all his days? To go out among the terrible ice-islands, and the cold white fields, where the young seals cried like wailing children? He did not like the prospect; but he was interrupted in his speculations by the old man, who wished to go home and rest in his arm-chair. Mike led his grandfather carefully along the rude path to the

tilt, and then was free to follow his own inclinations, which led him first towards the inn. The landlady called to him from the open door, and handing out a basket, desired him to go and gather berries for a party of the quality from St. Johns, who were dining somewhere in the woods, and whose carriage he saw standing in the inn-yard. Mike was willing enough for the employment, which suited the unusually thoughtful mood induced by his conversation with his grandfather; and no one knew better than he where to look for the choicest wild fruit. Leaving the road beyond the village—the pretty road that came winding down the valley beside a sparkling river—he turned to the right and began mounting the hill by the dry bed of a winter torrent, now forming a kind of rude stair up the side of the wooded hills. Such, indeed, were the only paths through the thickly-matted trees of low growth that clothed the heights. Here and there was a small patch clear of bushes, and carpeted with blossoms of a thousand colours. Into these the sun streamed hotly, drawing out the aromatic scent of the surrounding spruce firs; and it was in some such place that Mike hoped to find wild

strawberries. As he drew near a spot he fancied none but himself knew, he thought he heard a sound, and paused to listen. He might well be startled, for in those still woods there are no rabbits, no squirrels, scarcely ever a bird. No hum of insect life breaks the oppressive silence of the Newfoundland noon-tide; and Mike remembered a rumour, at which he had only laughed till now, of a wolf having been seen on one of the rocky paths in the wood. This was no wolf, however, for presently a clear, cheerful voice called out—

“Stop, little boy! Stand still just where you are for a minute! Don’t move an inch!”

Mike stopped in utter amazement, looking up and down, and around, for the speaker, but in vain. In two or three minutes, the same voice spoke again.

“Now you may come up the path. We want you. Come along;” and a merry laugh sounded with the words, as the bewildered boy looked about him, open-mouthed; “come straight up, and you will soon see us.”

Mike obeyed, and a few steps brought him to the green nest he had intended to visit, and which

he had hitherto always found lonely and still. Now, to his amazement, there were eight or ten ladies and gentlemen, of different ages, seated in a ring on the grass, a cloth spread in the centre, with dishes and glasses laid out upon it, and in one corner, heaped on fresh green leaves, all the wild strawberries he had hoped to find. He was quite dazzled by the scene—the ladies' pretty bright dresses, and the glitter of the glass and china in the sunshine, even the food, so unlike any he had ever seen—but presently he became conscious that some one was speaking to him, and taking off his cap he turned to listen. It was the same voice that had called to him just before, and the speaker was a young lady with a bright kind face, and a smile that reassured Mike and made him feel quite easy. She held up a picture before his eyes, and he exclaimed with wonder as he recognised a view of the bay down below, with boats on its sunny waters, and the rocky island far away, while in front was a mass of grey rock, such as he had just passed, and a line of trees. Under the rock stood the figure of a boy, and as the young lady pointed to this, she exclaimed, “Now you see why I called to

you to stop. I wanted to put you into my picture."

Mike felt quite confused at the honour that had been done him, and, making a bow, prepared to retreat the way he had come; but now several voices called to him to stop, and one of the gentlemen present handed him a jug, and asked if he would get some water from the river for a little girl who was thirsty.

"Faix and I will, sir, with all the pleasure in life," answered Mike, as the little girl smiled and nodded to him. He had all sorts of confused thoughts in his head as he ran down the hill—recollections of stories his grandfather had told him of fairies in the greenwood in old Ireland, which the old man more than half believed to be true. Mike felt that, if he had met that little girl alone, he might have thought she was some kind of spirit or angel, with her golden locks and soft eyes; not a mere child like those he played with in the village; but, as it was, she evidently belonged to the other people who were there, and whom he knew to be ladies and gentlemen such as he had often seen before. He had very soon dipped the jug in the stream and carried it, drop-

ping as little water by the way as he could, up to the gay party. The little girl smiled and nodded again when she saw him, and the others praised his diligence. The young lady who had drawn the picture, heaped some dainties on a plate and handed them to Mike, with her gracious smile, but he hesitated to eat them, and presently took courage to say, "Might I put them in my handkercher, miss, and take them to grandfather?"

"No; eat what you have there," replied the young lady, "and I will give you more for your grandfather."

Then a few questions brought out all Mike's little history, of which his head had been very full that day; since his talk with the old man. The young lady listened with interest, and made him tell her exactly where old Phil Murphy's tilt was situated; then giving him sundry good things to carry home, she said—

"Tell him the Governor will come and see him this afternoon. That tall gentleman there is the Governor," she continued, smiling at Mike's amazement, "and I am sure he would like to see the oldest man in Newfoundland."

Mike hardly stayed to speak his thanks, but

flew home with the wonderful news that the Governor was coming. Grannie was more excited by the intelligence than old Phil. She insisted on Mike's dressing himself in his Sunday clothes and washing his face and hands, and she made her little cabin even more neat than usual. She would have had Mike sit still in-doors, for fear of mishaps, but that was impossible. He could not rest, but went scrambling over the rocks, hoping to catch a glimpse of the strangers. He could not see them; for some were gone down under the cod-flakes to make a sketch of the waterfall, where the little river tumbled headlong over the cliff into the sea, and some were not yet tired of the woods.

The village was very quiet, as nearly all of the men were out fishing, and most of the children had just gone to afternoon school, where Mike would have gone too, but for the expected visit. Two or three women stood gossiping in the sun; poor Nat Casey, who had been ill, was sitting on the step of his own door, and two carpenters were putting a new railing round the churchyard. One of the women was Norah Tobin, a widow, whose husband had perished, like Mike's father, in the

ice, leaving her with an only child, a little Norah, who was the darling of the village. The little one was tired of standing still while her mother chatted with her friends, and catching sight of her frequent playmate Mike, she set off in pursuit. Mike's back was towards her, and he was absorbed in the search for the strangers, so he knew nothing, till, roused by a scream from Mrs. Tobin, he turned and saw little Norah disappear over the edge of the cliff. There was a rush towards the spot whence the child had fallen. The carpenters threw down their tools and flew to see if they could be of use, poor sick Nat Casey ran faster than he had done for many a day, and the women came wringing their hands and screaming for help. Mike ran like the rest, but, unlike them, he retained his presence of mind. Lying on his face, and looking down over the edge of the cliff, he saw that the child's frock had caught on a projecting piece of rock, and that thus her fall had been stayed for the present; her face was upturned and her head supported by a narrow ledge, so that she could not see the waves beating against the cliff forty or fifty feet below. That white terrified little face was sad enough to see, but Mike

had not time to look at it now. So long as the child did not struggle, and the threads of her frock held together, she would not fall; but already there was a rent which the strain of the child's weight was slowly enlarging, and if the frail web quite gave way, the weltering sea that was lapping the stones down below like a hungry wild beast, would swallow little Norah. The fishing-boats were too far out to help her, and the fishermen too busy to notice the frantic signals which Nat Casey made from the shore. Mike leant over the cliff's edge and spoke to the child.

"Never stir, Norah darlin'," he said, "we'll come to ye in a minute, but lie quite still." Then springing to his feet, he turned to the women, who were screaming with terror.

"Whisht, whisht!" he cried, "hold yer noise, or ye'll frighten the child. Down with ye here, Mrs. Tobin! Let her see the mother's face to keep her quiet. I'll bring a rope, and ye'll have her up in no time."

As Mike spoke these words, he was already at his grandfather's door, and in a moment he returned with the old woman's clothes-line in his hand. Poor sick Nat Casey had thrown off his

coat, determined, as he said, to be the one to be let down by the rope to the child's aid. All spoke in eager whispers now, except the mother, whose voice, loud and shrill with terror, never ceased speaking for a moment.

"Be still, Norah machree!" she said; "the Lord have pity on us! Mother's here, darlin'. Mike's comin' this minute. Keep still, alanna, never stir hand or foot. The Lord hold her fast till the help comes! Norah mavourneen, look at mother! Mike, Mike, are ye never comin'? O Lord, let the blessed angels keep her up! Norah, do ye see the mother here, close to ye, mavourneen?"

The child's eyes never moved from the mother's face, the little form remained still and rigid, and the frock still held out. Mrs. Tobin heard Mike's steps as he returned, but she did not look up. Nat Casey uttered a cry of disappointment when he saw the clothes-line.

"Is that all the rope ye've got, Mike?" he said, "and not a bit to be had nearer than Mr. Scanlan's store! The Lord have mercy on the poor babe! Why, boy, this cord would never hold a man."

"It may hold a boy, though," replied Mike, as he began knotting the line round his own waist. "I'm a bit lighter than you, Nat, and there's no time to run for more. Here, lend a hand to let me down."

No one thought of objecting, and Nat Casey and the two carpenters took hold of the rope. Mrs. Murphy was busy at her washing-tub, which she had carried out to the back of the cottage, lest the Governor should come, and old Phil dozed in his arm-chair, unconscious of his grandson's danger. There was indeed, as Mike had said, no time to spare. The child's weight hung now only by a few threads, and unless help was given at once, it must be in vain. Steadily and carefully Nat let the brave boy down, but he trembled when he saw the line reduced by tension to a mere whipcord. He dreaded to see it snap as it grated over the edge of the cliff. Down went Mike, saving himself by his hands and feet from being wounded against the stones; down, nearer and nearer to the child. Meantime the mother's voice continued in hoarse, eager tones. "Don't stir, darlin'!—leave it all to Mike!—Oh! the Lord keep his everlastin' arm round her!"

Wait till Mike tells ye, mavourneen!—he'll come soon, soon,—only never move till he bids ye!"

Mike himself uttered no sound: indeed he had enough to do to steady his descent, and to settle where and how to lay hold of Norah. Besides the thin rope cut his chest painfully, and made it difficult for him to use his arms. He was down at last on a level with the child, and close beside her head. Nat stopped letting out the rope, and even Mrs. Tobin ceased to speak in the terrible anxiety of that moment. Steadying himself with one hand against the cliff, Mike stretched out the other arm and firmly grasped the child's waist. Norah turned and clung to him. So far she was safe; and now Nat Casey began hauling up the rope. The strain from the added weight caused one of the strands to snap with a loud noise. Only two remained—would they hold out? No one spoke. Several persons had joined the party at the top of the cliff, but Nat Casey saw nothing, heard nothing, but the grating of the half-broken rope over the sharp stone. Still it held together. Inch by inch Mike and his precious burden were rising nearer to safety, and when they were close to the top, a strong arm was stretched over

the cliff, a strong hand clutched the boy's collar, drew him up and swung him into the midst of the group of spectators, while a cheer, in which even the women joined, rang out upon the air. Mrs. Tobin seized her child, who was sobbing wildly now that danger was over, and called down blessings on Mike's head.

"The blessin' of the widdy and the fatherless be wid ye, Mike, to the end of yer days!" she cried. "We'll pray for ye every time we ask a blessin' for ourselves; won't we, then, darlin'?" But Mike hardly understood what she said; the excitement was telling upon him now, and the pain caused by the cutting of the rope was very severe, so that he felt quite giddy and confused, and would have fallen, but that some one caught him and gently laid him on the ground, calling for water to be brought. In a few minutes Mike did not know where he was, but by and bye a dash of cold water in his face, and some pungent scent applied to his nostrils, made him open his eyes, and he became aware that he was surrounded by the same party he had seen in the wood, and that the young lady who drew his picture was now on her knees beside him, holding a scent-

bottle in her hand. In truth it was the Governor himself whose strong arm had pulled Mike over the edge of the cliff, and the Governor's voice that had rung out loudest in the cheer that announced the boy's safety. The little girl with the golden hair was standing by, and again she nodded and smiled as Mike's eye fell on her ; and there, best sight of all ! was Mrs. Tobin hugging little Norah, and hushing the child's sobs with her own joyful kisses.

" Well, my man," said the Governor, kindly, " do you think you can walk now ? Here, take my arm to help you along, and we'll go and see your grandfather. I want to wish him joy of his brave grandson."

So, holding the Governor's arm, and followed by all the ladies and gentlemen, Mike proceeded to his home. A rumour of his adventure had just reached Mrs. Murphy, and she was at the door when the procession approached. Old Phil sat in his arm-chair, from which the Governor forbade him to rise ; but Mrs. Murphy lifted off the red cap he wore, and let the long white hair fall over his shoulders. It was a pleasant picture of old age, and the little girl drew near and looked

wonderingly at it with her soft blue eyes, while the Governor spoke and old Phil Murphy answered. The Governor told him of what he called Mike's noble conduct, and said he should be glad to be of use to the boy.

"Here is my friend, Captain Brentwood," he added, "commanding one of the finest frigates in the navy. He is willing to take the lad to sea, if you can spare him."

"I humbly thank yer Excellency," replied old Phil; "whatever is for the boy's good" . . .

"Not while grandfather is alive, yer Excellency," interrupted Mike; "I couldn't leave the old man."

"Quite right," said the Governor; "you shall not leave the old man, Mike. But you have made friends who will not forget you, and when the right time comes, we will help you."

Then the Governor asked if he could do anything for Phil Murphy himself, but the old man smiled and shook his head.

"Yer Excellency is very good," he said, "but I'm too old to want for anything now. I shall like to remember this day, but it won't be for long."

The ladies meantime had been talking to Mrs. Murphy, admiring her knitting, and promising to send her some soft grey wool for the old man's stockings. They could not stay for the cup of tea which, with the usual hospitality of the country, was offered to them, for the Governor was anxious to get home. Farewells full of kindness were exchanged, and Mike was desired to call at Government House, and ask to see the family, whenever he should visit St. Johns. When the party were gone, Mike slipped out and followed them down the village. Avoiding the group of idlers near the inn, lest they should speak to him of his exploit, he went a little way along the road by which the strangers must pass, and gathered a few pretty wild flowers, in case he should have a chance of giving them to the little girl. Presently they came, some in an open carriage, some on horseback, a wonderfully gay spectacle for Mike, at sight of whom however they paused, to give him a last kind word, so that he was able to offer his nosegay, and see it received with a sweet smile. The cavalcade then passed away up the valley and was gone, and the most eventful day of Mike's boyish life closed.

without further adventure. Before the brief summer ended, Mr. Scanlan redeemed his promise of taking Mike Lacy to St. Johns, and even went with him to the door of Government House, whither the boy would hardly have found courage to go alone, so awed was he by what seemed to him the vast size of the building, and more still, perhaps, by the two sentries pacing before the door. No English child from the depths of the country, could look on the Queen's palace in London with more wonder and reverence than Mike felt, as he approached the large grey-stone building, standing in its own grounds above the town and overlooking the harbour. Three saddle-horses were waiting for their riders; and Mike had scarcely had time to look around him in the hall, and wonder at the stands of flowers, such as he had never seen before; at the servants hurrying to and fro, and the strange size and grandeur of the house; when the young lady who had drawn his picture, came out dressed in her hat and riding-habit, followed by the Governor and Captain Brentwood. They all recognised Mike at once, and spoke to him kindly; and the young *lady* took him into the drawing-room, bidding

Mr. Scanlan call for the boy as he went home in the evening. The little girl with golden locks was there, and she smiled and nodded at sight of Mike, while the rest of the family made him welcome, and asked news of his grandfather. It was a day of wonders from first to last, more like a dream than a reality. For weeks afterwards Mike loved to tell of the large lofty rooms, where every chair seemed to him a throne; of the mirrors and the pictures, the heaps of books, and the great box of music, from which one of the ladies brought out such grand tunes; the gold and silver time-pieces, and the china cups painted all over with birds and butterflies. There was the garden too, with its long rows of unknown vegetables, and its beds of flowers, among which the ladies walked up and down; the frames full of melons and long green cucumbers—things Mike had never even heard of before. There were the farm-yard; the hen-house, where there was a stove to keep the fowls warm in the winter; and the piggery, where every pig had a room to himself.

But in the midst of his delight, Mike remembered that his grandfather had bidden him ask

his way to the Chain-rock. He mentioned the subject to the young lady, who by this time had returned from her ride, and she sent a servant to show him the way. It was more for his grandfather's sake than his own, for he could not indulge sad thoughts on a day so full of happiness; and as he sat down in the niche that had once been his mother's favourite resort, he looked over a sea so blue and sunny, and up to a sky so cloudless, that the sea-gulls flitting hither and thither had not lighter hearts than he.

It was late in the evening when Mr. Scanlan called at Government House for Mike. The boy was laden with many little comforts for the old people; but the proudest event of the day had been the last, when the Governor shook him by the hand and said—

“I won’t forget you, my fine fellow. Come to me when you want anything.”

So Mike went home, feeling as if he were in some glorious car of triumph, rather than Mr. Scanlan’s one-horse cart. The moon was up long before he reached home, and old Phil had dropped asleep many a time in his chair, refusing to go to bed till the boy arrived. Mike could not but

acknowledge that the tilt looked smaller than it had ever done before; but he was not sorry to spread his mattress on the floor, stretch his weary limbs, and drop into a slumber so sound as to be unvisited even by dreams of the past day's delights.

Years have come and gone, and Mike Lacy is now nearly forty years old. The summer of his boyish adventure was the last that his grandfather lived to see; and when the old man died, Mrs. Murphy determined to return to the old country and see her married daughter and her native place once more. The Governor kept his promise to Mike, who only last year was boatswain on board the flag-ship of Rear-Admiral Brentwood, and who had the pleasure of recognising in the person of Mrs. Brentwood the very young lady who had drawn his picture in the woods of Newfoundland long years before.



LITTLE MAUD.

CHAPTER FIRST.

T was the breakfast-hour at Haildon Manor-house, and a cheerful party had assembled round the table in the large oak-panelled dining-room. Sir Hugh and Lady Clavell, their two sons and three daughters, and several guests, were there; and a solitary child, little Maud, whose parents were in India, stood beside Sir Hugh, eating the strawberries which he picked out for her with loving care from the dish before him. Any one could have seen at a glance how dearly old white-haired Sir Hugh loved the little girl. All the lively talk which was going on, and which evidently amused him though it puzzled Maud, never made him forget his little neighbour.

"No more strawberries, thank you, grand-papa," said Maud, at last; and then she stood quietly, satisfied that an occasional smile or pat on the head showed he remembered she was there. Presently the letter-bag was brought in, and every one stopped talking while Sir Hugh turned out its contents.

"The Indian mail ought to have arrived," observed Lady Clavell.

Maud grew very red, and watched the letters drop out one by one, but there was none of the thin paper she knew so well. She must wait another day for the mail. Sir Hugh heard her sigh.

"Never mind, little woman," he said kindly; "it will come to-morrow, I daresay."

Everybody was soon busy with letters and newspapers, so Maud crept silently away to her favourite nook. This was in the recess of one of the windows, screened from the room by a large flower-stand. Taking a beloved doll from its hiding-place, Maud crouched down under the tall fern-leaves and drooping fuchsias, and began a conversation with her waxen friend.

"Don't tell anybody, Emily Annabella," she

whispered, "but I am very much disappointed. I thought there would have been a letter for me from my dear mama, my pretty mama, that I have not seen for two whole years. But I remember her, O yes, I remember her!" and Maud leaned back against the flower-stand, and looked out with dreamy eyes through the open window.

The gardener had been mowing, and now he was sweeping the lawn and carrying away the scented grass. The dew yet lingered on the flower-beds, over which lay the shadow of the house, and the scent of roses and mignonette floated freely into the room. Far away were the wooded slopes of the Park, with sheep nibbling the short grass, or lying in white groups in the shade. Nearer to the house, just within the boundary of the pleasure-ground, stood one or two fine cedars, near which, in beautiful contrast, had been placed some aloe plants with spires of snow-white bells. Now and then a few of Lady Clavell's favourite white pigeons flitted past, like a flash of light, and settled for a few moments on the lawn, among the beds of red and purple and yellow blossoms, till the gardener's movements disturbed them again, and they flitted away.

Maud loved the aloes, for she faintly remembered such plants in her Indian home. She liked also the long fern-leaves, which reminded her of young palms, as she looked up at them from her hiding-place. All this and much more she told Emily Annabella ; and then, perhaps because it is tiresome to talk to a person who makes no answer, and shows no sympathy, Maud allowed the doll to fall into her lap, and amused herself with thinking. She fancied herself in the old home in India—the low-roofed house thatched with palm-leaves, with the dark native servants passing noiselessly to and fro, or waiting in the shady verandah. She seemed to hear the lapping of the quiet sea on the rocks near the house, or the rustle of leaves as the evening breeze began to blow. There were great tall trees covered with red and yellow flowers, under which she played while waiting for papa to return from his office in the evening. By and bye came the welcome sound of wheels, and papa's carriage appeared in sight beyond the row of India-rubber trees, whose every branch was tipped with a rose-coloured bud. Papa took Maud on his shoulder, and carried her into the verandah, where mama

came to meet them with the baby-brother in her arms. But just as Maud was going to look at her brother, a voice said—

“But what are we to do with little Maud?” and suddenly the Indian home, and the papa and mama and baby-brother, were all gone, and the little girl was once more in the dining-room at Haildon Manor. The fact was that Maud had been dreaming. She had risen hours ago, and worked in her garden till the sun was high, and now she had been asleep under the fern-leaves.

Meanwhile there had been a great deal of eager talking round the breakfast-table, not disturbing Maud till her own name was mentioned. It had been proposed that all the party present should go abroad for a six weeks’ tour in Switzerland, and the plan was agreed to by all, till Sir Hugh said, “But what are we to do with little Maud?” Lady Clavell, however, was ready with a reply. “My niece, Mary Tracy,” she said, “is going to take her children to the seaside, and she has offered to take Maud too, thinking the change might be good for the dear child. I think we had better let her go. She is too delicate to travel with us, and quite too young to enjoy such a trip as ours.”

Maud crept out of her hiding-place, and took her station near Sir Hugh again. He put his arm round her and said—

“ Will you be happy with Mrs. Tracy, little Maud ? ”

“ I hope so, grandpapa,” she answered ; but her heart sank a little at the prospect. Here, she was the darling of the house, the pet and plaything of her grown-up uncles and aunts, and the special charge of Lady Clavell, to whose care the child had been committed by her parents, Sir Hugh’s eldest son and his wife.

There was a pause, and then Lady Clavell said, “ After all, I don’t see why you should not go without me. You would be able to travel quicker and go farther.”

There was a chorus of voices, Sir Hugh’s being the loudest, in reply—

“ No, no ; that will never do. You have said you will go, and you must come. Besides,” continued the youngest daughter alone, “ papa would not enjoy it without you, mama.”

“ I see what it is,” said Maud’s uncle, Major Clavell. “ Grandmama thinks no one but herself can take proper care of little Maud. Now, on

Saturday next, I promise to take charge of the child, pack her up in silver paper, and convey her safely to Williton; delivering her to Mrs. Tracy with any amount of messages and warnings that grandmama may think proper to send. What do you say, Maud? will you trust yourself with me?"

Her face brightened as she answered "Yes;" for Major Clavell, in spite of the loud voice and fierce moustache which had alarmed her when she first knew him, was now her favourite uncle. Lady Clavell, too, seemed satisfied with the arrangement, and the whole matter was settled. That was a lively day at the Manor. All the guests departed at noon, and then the family busied themselves with preparations for their tour. Maud was very active, helping everybody, and running on messages from one part of the house to another, so that she scarcely had a moment to herself, and only once found an opportunity of going to the housekeeper's-room to coax the pet white kitten, and give it a lesson in climbing her shoulder and running over the top of her head. The three aunts—Edith, Cecilia, and Adelaide—were in high spirits, and made the hall

and staircase resound with Swiss mountain-songs, calling on Maud to join in the merry choruses. She almost wished at last that she could go too, and see the great white peaks glisten and turn red in the sunset, hear the waterfalls thundering down the valleys, and walk on the sea of ice, which she fancied must be like the wonderful crystal sea she read of in the Revelations. Aunt Adelaide had already been in Switzerland, and her descriptions made Maud think of it as a land of wonder. Perhaps grandmama read in the little girl's face the wish that was beginning to disturb her mind, for she called Maud to come and choose what books and toys she would like to take away with her, and talked so cheerfully over them of the pleasures of the sea-shore, as to disperse every shadow of discontent. Saturday came, and the carriage was at the door. Sir Hugh lifted little Maud into her seat, and talked merrily, pretending not to see the tears that dimmed her blue eyes. The little maid who always attended her took the place opposite, and presently Major Clavell, after some last words from his mother, jumped in and sat beside his niece, and the carriage moved on, reaching the

station only just in time to catch the train for Williton.

The journey occupied about an hour, and the time passed very quickly, so much was Maud amused with her uncle's conversation. He told her all sorts of stories of his own adventures by sea and land, and soon brought back smiles to the dear little face, which he could not bear to see clouded with sadness.

"Have you ever been to the seaside before?" he asked, when he saw she was able to answer.

"Never, Uncle George—at least, not in England," said Maud. "Our house in India was near the sea, and I can remember seeing the waves in the monsoon come dashing up over the flat black rocks; but we never played there, and I don't think there were any sands."

"Then I envy you, Maud. I recollect my first trip to the seaside, and I hardly think I have ever been so happy since. There were only four of us then—your father and I, Edith and Cecilia—and we had all been ill with measles, or some such misery, and kept for weeks close prisoners to the house. I assure you we had learnt to look on our nursery as a sort of jail,

and Hugh and I sometimes whispered together of knocking down old nurse, and making our escape into the park. My father was in London, and my mother confined to her room by illness, so we thought they must both be unconscious of our cruel imprisonment; and we also had a vague notion that the laws of our country would protect us, if only we could escape from our tyrant and make our case known to the world. Hugh, being the eldest, was to begin the attack. I must tell you he had not yet reached the age of seven, and was a small boy of his years. Well, we muttered vengeance to each other every night as we lay in bed, and made plans for knocking nurse down the next morning with the bolsters, tying her hands with the sheets, and then rushing forth into the park; but when morning came, the enterprise seemed so difficult, and nurse so tall and strong, that we deferred the attack for another opportunity. As for the girls, they were quite too young to be taken into our counsels. Boys of six and seven think very little of babes under three years old.

“Our captivity had lasted for what seemed to us a very long time, and our spirits were cowed

and bent, so that we had at last given up all idea of trying to free ourselves; when one day we observed an unusual bustle in our prison. Boxes and carpet-bags were drawn from their hiding-places, nurse was ransacking drawers and cupboards, and bringing out heaps of our clothes. By and bye she was on her knees packing, absolutely packing, our garments for a journey. Was it really so? Could it be possible that our wretched imprisonment was about to cease? Hugh ventured to ask the question, and the reply was not quite amiable, being, 'There, do get away, Master Hugh! I don't believe there ever was such a meddlesome, noisy, tiresome boy as you be, except it's Master George. What I shall do with you all at the seaside I'm sure I can't tell; but I shouldn't wonder if you was drownded, and your brother too, before we come home again. Get away, do!' 'Then we are going away?' shouted Hugh; and he proceeded to perform an Australian war-dance, lately taught us by a cousin who had been in that country. Whooping, screaming, and rapping sticks on the floor, he careered round nurse—I doing my utmost to imitate his movements and his noise—till the dis-

tracted woman seized each of us by a shoulder and hurled us into the adjoining room, where, nothing daunted, we finished the performance as vigorously as we had begun it.

" You must not suppose, Maud, that we knew what sort of place it was to which we were going. Our delight arose from the thought that we were to have a change, that we were once more to be free. Hugh was so excited that at the conclusion of our war-dance, he proposed a general smash of all the toys in the room. ' I know we shall always hate them,' he said, ' for they'll remind us of this dreary time. Smash, and crash, and dash them all into little bits, George, the stupid dull things ! ' The clatter we made brought nurse to the door, and she was so angry, that we were forthwith undressed and put into our beds, though we had not yet had our tea ; and, as we were apt to be very hungry after our illness, Hugh and I were fain to beg our tyrant in moving tones to give us a little food, before she went to her own supper.

" The next day, under nurse's sole charge, we went to the seaside. We had been wondering what it would be like as we came along, and

when at last, from the hill above Firley, we saw the broad smooth surface glittering in the sun, we hardly knew what to think of it. We soon made up our minds on the subject, however, when nurse took us down on the sands; and the decision we came to was, that nothing in the whole world could be so pleasant as the seaside. On the sands day after day we played, we ran races with the waves, we built forts and caught crabs, and picked up shells and wonderful pebbles; we were allowed to dabble in the water, to wet our feet, and stain our clothes. Nay, even if our hats were blown into the sea and fished out all dingy and mis-shapen, nurse took the whole business as a matter of course, and simply bought us new ones.. In our lodgings we had basons filled with messes of sea-weed and shells, and no one scolded us. In short, but for one circumstance, we should have felt almost too happy to believe we were awake.

“The first terrible shock to our peace was when nurse, on the second morning of our stay, insisted on our each drinking a cupful of bitter salt water. We were obliged to obey, though with wry faces, and then we soon forgot all about it

in our play on the shore. The next morning nurse took us to a new part of the beach, where some odd-looking carts stood in a row.

“‘I suppose these are prisons for naughty people,’ said Hugh. ‘Just look, George, what dismal little cupboards on wheels they are.’

“‘Never you mind, Master Hugh,’ said nurse, ‘you’re coming into the cupboard with me;’ and she led us, speechless with surprise, over a plank into one of the little dens on wheels, closed the door after her, and began undressing us. Hugh kicked violently, and desired to be taken out again; but presently the vehicle began to move, a voice outside called out, ‘All right,’ and away we went, bumping over pieces of rock, into the sea. Through wide chinks in the floor we could see the waves, when with a jerk we stopped. Nurse went on undressing Hugh, who now stood quite still, and she ordered me to take off my shoes and stockings. While I obeyed, my heart swelled, and at last I cried, ‘O nurse, we are two little boys, and you are very large and strong. What are you going to do with us?’ ‘To do with you, Master George? Why to bathe you in the beautiful sea, to be sure.’

"There came a knock at the door towards the sea, and nurse threw it open. There was the great sea, the waves tipped with white foam, rolling into the bay and dashing over the steps that were suspended from the door. This would have been sufficiently alarming, but there was still something more. There was a figure, a huge figure clothed in dark blue, with a poke bonnet shading a reddish-brown face ; there was a pair of hard large hands stretched forth, while a hoarse voice growled out, 'Are they ready for me, the little dears ?' I was nearest to the door. I tried to get away, but the relentless monster seized me. Once, twice, thrice, was I plunged into the seething water ; then, dizzy, breathless, and terrified, I was handed to nurse, while the kicking Hugh was subjected to a similar indignity. The Ogress grinned as she handed him back, and said, 'Pretty dears ! they'll like it better by and bye ; old Molly can tell them that !' Hugh stamped and bade her go away, and she laughed and shut the door upon us. We landed, boiling with indignation, and we very soon learned to bathe without the assistance of old Molly ; but I assure you, Maud, I shudder still whenever I meet one of those *awful figures* on the shore."

"Shall I see any, Uncle George?" inquired Maud, with a smile.

"Perhaps you may," he answered, "for I believe the race is not extinct; and you need not be alarmed, for they are harmless creatures after all, and they will be very gentle with you."

Here the train stopped; the guard shouted "Williton," or something a little like it, and Maud's railway journey was over.

CHAPTER SECOND.

MRS. TRACY'S home was a pretty cottage, with latticed windows peeping out of a complete bower of roses and jessamine. There was a lawn in front of it, bordered by a shrubbery, and at the back were a large garden and two or three fields, whence the hay had been but lately carried. Everything about the place looked very small after Haildon, but very pretty and pleasant. Maud followed her uncle shyly into the hall, where Mrs. Tracy met them. The little girl was generally afraid of strangers, but a glance at Mrs. Tracy's gentle face, and the kind words which

that lady addressed to her, soon relieved the feeling of strangeness. Presently a door leading into the hall was suddenly flung open, and a tall girl of twelve years old, with hair hanging wildly about her round rosy face, came forward exclaiming, "Is cousin Maud come, mama?"

"My dear Annie, when *will* you learn to be gentle?" said Mrs. Tracy, with a sigh. Indeed, there never was a stronger contrast than between the quiet, refined, delicate mother, and the loud, uncouth, healthy daughter. So it seemed at first to little Maud; but she soon learned that there was a kind heart under poor Annie's rough exterior; and Mrs. Tracy knew it already, for she said, "I give Maud into your charge, Annie. Take her to her room, and do all you can to help her. Shake hands with cousin George before you go."

Annie shook hands with Major Clavell without moving her eyes from Maud's face, tossed her head to shake the hair out of her way, and then called her little cousin to follow her up the narrow staircase to the tiny room in which the latter was to sleep. Compared with the nursery at Haildon, it was but a closet, with a small window peering out from the thatched roof, and overshadowed

with nodding roses ; but Maud was delighted. She stood near the window, looking out over the garden and fields, and declared everything was beautiful. Annie looked pleased.

"I'm very glad you like it," she said; "though, to be sure, we are all going away to the sea on Monday ; so it doesn't much signify."

"I like it very much, thank you," said Maud ; "I never saw such a pretty cottage before."

She proceeded to take off her hat and coat. Annie looked on with evident amusement, while Maud laid her things neatly on a chair, folded her gloves together, and smoothed her hair with her hands, in the absence of a comb.

"What a little fidget you are, to be sure," she observed. "You'll delight Miss Somers' heart with your tidy ways. I never could do it, for anything in the world. When I come in, down goes my hat here, and my coat there. I don't wear gloves much," she added, smiling, as she held up her sunburnt hands ; "I couldn't be at the trouble of finding them every time I went out. Are you ready to come down ? You look as if you had just stept out of a band-box, and the bell will ring for dinner in a minute."

"I am just ready," replied Maud. "Can I help you?" and she glanced at Annie's shaggy locks.

"O no," was the answer; "I am ready. I never dress again till the evening;" then, seeing Maud's eye fall on her inky fingers, she added, reddening a little as she spoke, "Oh! it's no use to be for ever washing one's hands. Ink-spots won't come off, and I never think anything of them. Come down into the schoolroom, and see Julia and Con. The boys are to join us at Filby Monday evening, so you'll only see Julia and Con to-day. Miss Somers is going away to-night," continued Annie, in a whisper, "so we shall have nothing but holidays while you are with us. Isn't that delightful? I don't mean to open a book once, all the time, I can tell you!"

"Are they your sisters—Julia, and what name did you say?" inquired Maud.

"Julia and Con are my sisters," replied Annie. "Con's the short for Constance, and Julia is generally called Ju or Shylock. The boys call her Shylock, because Robert once acted Shylock the Jew, in one of Shakespeare's plays, that they used to be for ever spouting."

"Oh, I know," said little Maud ; "that pretty story about Portia and the three caskets. I've read it in Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare. Still, I don't see why they should call your sister Shylock."

"Why, because she's a Ju—a Jew—don't you see ?" said Annie, laughing. "It's a joke. Now, this is the schoolroom ;" and she led Maud into a small room, where two little girls were putting aside their books, while their governess was busy packing up her desk and papers. These younger cousins were very like Annie, except that they had more shyness, which Maud found very catching. Miss Somers came forward, and good-naturedly tried to set the party at ease ; but before they could say much to each other, the bell rang, and they all hurried downstairs to the dining-room. Here they were joined by Mrs. Tracy and Major Clavell, and presently by Captain Tracy, bluff, and strong, and rosy as his daughters. Maud, unused to children, was entertained with the lively chatter that went on around her, though she spoke little herself ; and her uncle was pleased to see how much she already felt at home with these relations. As he watched her, he said within himself, "What a contrast

between the trim little figure, with its pretty graceful ways, and those great, rough, unmannerly girls! How it must vex Mary Tracy to see it!" Nevertheless, Mrs. Tracy was saying to herself, at the very same time, "What a difference between that poor little white-faced child and my healthy, blooming girls! George must be very much struck by it. Poor little thing!"

Soon after dinner Major Clavell took his departure. He remembered long afterwards how lovingly Maud's arms clung round his neck, and how she kissed him again and again, in spite of the offending moustache. As he passed out at the gate, he looked round, and saw the little figure still on the steps of the door, watching him go—a pretty white-robed fairy, framed in the ivy and passion-flowers that mantled the porch. It was a picture that he never forgot.

Life at the seaside realized Maud's hopes. The Tracy boys, who were younger than Annie and older than her sisters, proved to be sharers in the good humour which seemed the special blessing of the family. Rude they might be, and inconsiderate, but never cross or unkind. The weather was delightful, either for the shore,

where long hours were spent unweariedly in building up forts and digging trenches, to be utterly destroyed by the next merciless tide; or for rambles on the breezy hills, from whose grassy tops might be seen, besides a vast expanse of sea, tall white cliffs with bluest shadows, wide fields yellow with harvest, and houses nestling here and there in wooded hollows. Annie and her little sisters were fond of bathing, and they soon tempted Maud to go with them into the sunny waves, and to dance and float as fearlessly as they did themselves. One day when they were all sitting on the beach, tired of play, Maud told her cousins Major Clavell's account of his first experience in bathing, and of old Molly the Ogress. The next morning, when the girls were going to bathe as usual, a bathing-woman approached, to ask if she could be of any use to them.

"Maud, Maud!" cried Annie, "here's old Molly coming to carry you off! Beware of the Ogress!"

It might indeed have been Molly herself, to judge by the dark-blue dress, the poke bonnet, and the reddish-brown face, only that time must

have been standing still with her, if this were the person Major Clavell had described.

"Hush! she will hear you," said Maud; and, fearful that the woman should fancy her cousins were rude, she took the large hand that was offered her, and allowed herself to be led away into deeper water, feeling new confidence in her guide's strength and experience. Annie and her sisters disdained all assistance; but from this day Maud always looked out for the Ogress, as Annie called the woman, and was quite disappointed if she were out of the way. By degrees, the woman told the child the simple story of her life and its trials; how her husband had been a fisherman, lost at sea three years ago; how, of all her pretty children, only one was living now, and he the best and brightest boy that ever mother could wish to see. Maud knew him well by sight—a flaxen-headed merry boy of twelve, who went out with parties in a pleasure-boat, and seemed the pet of all the old boatmen along the shore. "I'm glad you noticed him, Miss," said the bathing-woman. "A better boy than my Jack you couldn't find in the three kingdoms. He's a steady, good son, reads his chapter to me every

night of his life, and goes to church quite regular. I can bear a deal while I have Jack." So the mother talked, sitting under the shadow of the bathing-machines, knitting a stocking of coarse grey wool for her boy; and Maud was a willing listener. She liked to hear of a manner of living so different from anything she had ever known. She fancied the mother's anxious watching in winter-time, when the boy went out with some old fisherman to learn the dangerous trade in which his father perished. How the poor lonely mother must pray for her boy's safety, in those dark dreary nights when the storm beat against the window! Maud remembered a storm at sea, when she was on her way home from India. She could recal the howling of the wind and the roaring of the great waves in the dark night. Surely in some such fearful storm the poor fisherman must have been lost.

"How glad you must be when summer comes!" exclaimed Maud, looking out over the sea, smooth and sparkling in the sunshine.

"Ah, Missy!" replied the woman, "summer and winter we're in the Lord's hand. He'll do the best for us, if we trust Him. It doesn't do

to fret ourselves about what's good and what's bad. He knows all about it."

"But you ask Him to take care of your boy," reasoned Maud.

"Yes, Missy. He's so good and kind, I don't think He's angry at our telling Him our poor wishes for them that we love; but, all the same, He'll do what is best for them. Do you think I didn't pray for my poor husband's life, Missy? I asked the Lord to take care of him, and to give him health, and peace, and plenty; and so He did, Missy, but not the way I meant—not the way I should have chosen, if it had been left to me. The Lord took him away to the Good Place, Missy. Don't you know what it says in the Revelations?—'And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.' That's where my husband is now, Missy, so the Lord has given him better than I asked for."

Maud grew very thoughtful. None of those she loved had ever yet passed away from this world. The Good Place of which this poor woman spoke so confidently, was to the child's mind a region of awe and mystery.

"My five little ones are there too," continued the woman. "They might have had a hard life here, but they went so soon, they could scarcely remember their poor home with me. Pretty darlings! they'll never want for anything."

"But I hope God will let Jack stay with you," said Maud.

"I hope so, Missy," replied the mother, hastily. "I can't help hoping it;" and she let her knitting drop on her knee, while she looked out over the sands, where her boy was hauling up his little boat. The breeze was blowing out his yellow hair, as he gave laughing answers to the old boatman who helped him. No wonder the mother's heart rejoiced at sight of the blithe active boy. Maud moved away to rejoin her cousins, as Jack came to call his mother to come in and give him some tea. Annie complained that her little cousin was graver than usual that evening, and declared she should never talk to the Ogress again, if it made her melancholy; but Maud took up the defence of her poor friend very warmly, and asserted that the sadness was all in Annie's imagination.

CHAPTER THIRD.

THREE weeks at Filby passed away like a dream, and the children were not yet weary of any one of the pleasures of the sea-shore. Annie, Julia, and Constance, had grown more robust than ever, and showed faces and hands nearly as much sunburnt as those of the Ogress herself. The boys had been taught to row during Captain Tracy's occasional visits to his family, and at other times they found plenty of amusement. Even little Maud looked less fragile, and had a tint of pink, like the lining of a sea-shell, stealing into her cheek. Meantime, a letter came now and then to the little girl from her distant Indian home, and more frequently from the travellers in Switzerland ; so she had nothing left to wish for.

“ Who's for the sands ? ” said Captain Tracy one morning, as the family rose from the breakfast-table. Every one answered in the affirmative, and they were soon on their way. As they approached the shore, their attention was attracted by an unusual crowd moving up from the water's edge. Captain Tracy asked one of the boatmen whether anything was the matter down there.

"There was an accident early this morning, sir," replied the man. "A boat was upset, and three young gentlemen were lost, and the young boy that went with them."

"Oh! was it Jack?" asked Maud, in a voice of terror.

"Yes, little Miss," answered the man; "it was poor Jack Wilmot, the bathing-woman's son. There isn't such another lad hereabouts. I hadn't the heart to tell his mother, poor soul! John Stokes, the old man that's always about here among the boats, saw Jack put off this morning, and he says the young gentlemen were playing all sorts of tricks with the boat. Old John called to them to be careful, and Jack was arguing with them, but I suppose they wouldn't heed. Old John sat blinking in the sun, as he does always, and by and bye he caught sight of the boat drifting along, bottom upwards. He called for help then, but it was too late. They've found em' all now, sir, but they'd been three hours in the water. They're carrying Jack home, poor lad!"

The boatman turned away with something very like a sob. Maud felt giddy and miserable. She could not stand, but sank down on the

shingle pale and trembling. The crowd was moving towards the mother's cottage. As they reached the door and some of the people fell back, Maud saw some yellow hair shining in the sunlight. She could not look any longer, but covered her face with her hands and cried, unnoticed by the rest, who were eagerly talking of the misfortune ; while Captain Tracy walked away to seek further information, and to telegraph to the friends of the young men who had been drowned. Before he went, he put some money into the boatman's hands for the poor bathing-woman.

"Not that money can comfort her," he said, "but to prevent her having any trouble about the expense of her boy's funeral."

The words caught Maud's ear, and set her thinking. Would the lonely mother find comfort now ? Would she still feel that God knew best ? Would she bear to look out any more over that great cruel sea ? Maud was glad that in the Good Place there would be "no more sea,"—nothing to remind poor broken-hearted wives and mothers of sorrow like this. Would Jack's mother be able to feel it was better for her boy to go, than to stay with her ?

The children were all hushed and still. There was no playing on the shore that day, but they sat in a group speaking softly, with grave faces; for the shadow of a great sorrow had fallen near them. The next day the Tracy children rallied their spirits a little, but all the pink colour had faded from Maud's cheek, and she looked so ill that Mrs. Tracy felt uneasy about her.

"Take her away from this place," said Captain Tracy; "she has had a great shock, and she is but a tender little thing. All the children have been very much affected by this accident. You had better go back to the cottage with them to-morrow."

It was so settled accordingly. Annie and Maud took a last stroll in the dusk, towards the place where the latter had often met her poor friend, close to the bathing-machines; and there, to their surprise, they found her seated in her usual place, but without her usual knitting-needles. She rose when she saw Maud, and came up to her.

"Ah! little Missy," she said, taking the little soft hand that was held out as she drew near, "I wanted to see you again. I was thinking of our

talk the other day. It's come very soon, isn't it, dear? I've been thinking it over, and trying to feel it is best; but oh, Missy! my poor heart's very sore."

"I am so sorry for you, so sorry," said little Maud, tears rolling down her cheeks. "I hope you will be able to bear it well; but I am very, very sorry."

"God bless you, little Missy! He will help me to bear it. We've One to trust to, Missy, that knows what our hearts are like. He'll send the comfort by and bye. He won't forget me, dear."

Maud and Annie walked home in silence, both very thoughtful; and the former did not forget, in her evening prayer, to commend the childless widow to the great Consoler of hearts.

The following afternoon found Maud again at the pretty cottage, and all the children felt their spirits grow lighter as they lost sight of the sea. Another week passed very pleasantly away, and Mrs. Tracy rejoiced to hear Maud's voice again sounding cheerfully in games with the other children. But these happy days came to a sudden end. One evening, Julia complained of thirst and

headache, and no persuasions could induce her to leave the sofa. All night she was restless, and the next day she became really ill. Mrs. Tracy sent in alarm for the doctor, who pronounced the disease to be fever of an infectious character. Annie and Con were, he thought, already sickening with the same complaint; but the boys and Maud had as yet no symptom of it, and he therefore urged their being sent away immediately. The boys were despatched to a farmhouse a few miles off, and Captain Tracy took Maud back to Haildon Manor, and left her under the care of the housekeeper, writing at the same time to Lady Clavell to tell her what had happened. Unluckily the travellers had not kept to the route they had originally proposed, and a long time elapsed before Lady Clavell received the letter.

It was a sad change at first from the cheerful cottage to the solitude of Haildon. Maud's own young maid, for whom there had been no room at Williton when the whole family returned from Filby, had obtained permission to go and visit her family in Scotland, where she was to remain a month. The attention of Mrs. Thompson the housekeeper was engrossed by two important

matters—the making of preserves, which she allowed no one but herself to attempt, and the superintendence of the maids who were cleaning the house. The carpets were up in every room, the curtains unhung ; the sound of the scrubbing-brush never ceased, buckets of steaming water cumbered the stairs, and an odour of soap-suds pervaded the whole dwelling. Mrs. Thompson looked dismayed at Maud's unexpected arrival.

“ Whatever can I do with the child ? ” she exclaimed again and again, when Captain Tracy, uneasy about his own children, had bidden Maud good-bye, and hurried back to the station to catch the next train. A little garret-chamber near her own was hastily prepared. Maud was to take her meals in the housekeeper's room, and live as much in the open air as possible. Fortunately, the weather was fine, and the out-of-door life very agreeable. None of the neighbours came to the house. The rector's wife sent to say she was afraid to let her children see Maud for the present, lest she should convey infection ; so the little girl's solitude was complete.

Some children might have been sad under such circumstances ; but it was not Maud's way to be

sad, and she was too young, perhaps, to fret herself with fears about the fever. She would still sing to herself as she went up and down the stairs, though more softly than usual. She might be a little graver than formerly, but there was no gloom in all her thoughts. She was sure to be happy as soon as she left the hall-door. All the tumult within could not alter the exterior of the grand old house, with its dark red walls, and its many windows bordered with white stone; the terrace, with its sloping bank of gayest flowers, the lawn dotted with bright beds, the cedars whose heavy boughs swept the daisied grass, and the broad park with its many beauties,—all well known to little Maud. One companion, too, watched for her with loving eyes till she came on the terrace, and then followed her in all her wanderings,—this was Tiger, the old house-dog. If she strolled on the terrace, or ran on the lawn, he kept close at her heels; if she worked in her garden, he lay on the path beside her, his nose resting on his great black paws; if she took a book and sat, as she was fond of doing, on the lowest bough of the great cedar, where she could gently rock herself if she felt so disposed, Tiger would

stretch himself so near, that she could use him as a footstool, or reach to pat his shaggy black head with her little hand.

Three whole days passed in the same way. Hurried meals in Mrs. Thompson's sitting-room, and long, lonely hours out of doors. The fourth morning came, and Maud sat with her four-footed companion under the cedar, rather at a loss for employment.

"What shall we do?" she said, with a sigh, addressing the dog for lack of a human listener. "Tiger, dear old Tiger, I'm very tired of this way of living. I'd give anything to say my lessons, if Aunt Addy were only here. I've finished my book, and when I asked Mrs. Thompson for another, she said I really could not have one, for all the books were put away while the book-cases were being polished. I don't like to work when I've nobody to tell me a story. O dear! O dear! what are we to do, old doggie?"

She almost fancied Tiger understood her words, for he got up and stretched himself, then looked round, as if to propose a change of place. Maud rose, laughing—"So we will, Tiger," she continued; "we'll go for a walk. We can't come to

any harm if we don't go beyond the park. Come on, good old doggie! you shall have a dip in the stream."

She crossed the lawn, and opened a wire gate leading into a path, marked out from the longer grass of the park by its smooth, closely-cut turf. On the right was a grove of old trees, in the tallest of which a colony of rooks had from time immemorial made their home: on the left, an oak and two or three horse-chestnuts, only so far separated as to let in bars of sunshine across the sward, gave to the green walk the beauty of an avenue, without its formality. Little Maud tripped along this pleasant pathway to the end of the grove; then turning to the right, still keeping the old trees on the one hand, while a screen of noble limes sheltered her on the other, she walked on till she crossed a wooden bridge over the dry bed of a stream. She was now in a wilder part of the park—farther than she had ever been from the house without a companion.

"Never mind, Tiger," she said; "you are my companion now, dear old doggie, and you won't let me come to any harm."

They passed through a second grove, beyond

which flowed a little stream. Maud could hear the water bubbling among the rushes long before they reached the bank. She thought Tiger heard it also, for he became excited, pricked up his ears, ran forward, and began to bark. Maud ran after him, that she might not lose the pleasure of seeing her old favourite spring into the water; but, as she came closer, she saw that Tiger's excitement was caused by the sight, on the opposite bank, of a boy, who took no notice whatever of the dog's displeasure, but went on with his occupation. This appeared to be, baiting fishing-lines, and fastening them to the bushes. He was a stranger to Maud, looked but little older than herself, and was shabbily dressed. She looked at him for some time without his noticing her, and at length said—

“Boy, what are you doing here?”

He started, and reddened as he looked up; then replied in a surly tone—

“Never you mind; I don’t ask what you’re doing, and you needn’t trouble yourself about me.”

“But I think I ought,” persisted Maud. “I think you have no business to do that.”

"To do what?" said the boy. "How do you know what I'm doing? You go away and leave me alone."

"I see what you are doing," persisted Maud; "I came here with grandpapa once, when he found some lines like that; and he said it was poaching. You should not come here without grandpapa's leave. This is his park."

"Stuff!" said the boy. "I suppose you'll say this water is his, and this fish; and the water ran in a few minutes ago, under the park-paling down below there, and will run out again in a few minutes by Prior's lane. How do you know these fish you see, haven't come miles to-day, and won't go miles yet, out into places where nobody ever heard of your grandpapa? The fish is mine, just as much as his."

Maud was rather puzzled, but presently she said, "At any rate this ground belongs to grandpapa, and I don't think you ought to come without his leave. I would ask him to let you come and fish here, if you liked, and I am sure he would give you leave; but I know he would be angry to see those lines set here."

"I suppose you'll go and tell him," said the boy.

"He's not at home now," replied Maud; "but please take them away."

All this time Tiger was very restless, occasionally giving a low growl, and only kept from fiercer conduct by the pressure of Maud's hand on his head. Just now, something in the boy's tone, when, in reply to Maud's remonstrance, he muttered angrily, "Leave me alone! I told you before it was no business of yours," gave fresh offence to the faithful dog, and he plunged into the water and swam towards the opposite bank. The boy fled to a plank that crossed the stream a little higher up, and rushing over it at headlong speed, approached Maud, exclaiming, "Call off your dog, will you?" But Tiger was already cooled by the water, and, finding his enemy had fled, showed no disposition to return to land. Maud held up her hand as the boy drew nigh, and cried, "Don't come near me! nobody is allowed to come near me, for fear I should make them ill."

"Are you a little white poison-witch, then?" asked the boy, laughing, as a glance showed him that Tiger manifested no intention of following him at present. "You don't look much of a thing for anybody to be afraid of."

"But indeed you must not come," repeated Maud. "I've been in a house where there was a bad fever, and you might catch it and be ill too."

"What would that matter?" said the boy, throwing himself down on the grass a little way off. "Besides, how could I catch it from you, if you haven't got it? Stuff! If I was to be ever so ill, I should like to know who'd care."

"I think *you* would care," answered Maud, smiling. "You would not like to lie in bed, feeling very uncomfortable, instead of coming out here. And other people would care too. Haven't you a father and mother alive?"

"No," he said, picking off the heads of the daisies and tossing them into the stream; "my father and mother died in India or China, or some such place, when I was a small boy at school in England, so I don't even recollect them."

"I am sorry," said Maud; "but somebody must take care of you. Who do you live with?"

"I live at my uncle's, Mr. Short's, if you know where that is."

"I don't know," replied Maud.

"It's a dull grey house, with a field before it, and two or three sticks of fir-trees, on the London

road ; and it's duller inside than out, I can tell you, though you might wonder how that could be. Uncle is out at the bank all day, and my aunt fidgets after her carpets and what not, while he is out, and grumbles to him when he comes home, till he scolds at everybody. A nice sort of home, isn't it?"

Maud hardly knew how to answer. Presently, however, she continued the conversation by asking—

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"Not one," was the reply; "I never had any."

"Any cousins?" asked Maud.

"Plenty. There are four boys of my uncle's."

"Well, that's nearly as good as having brothers and sisters."

"That's what you think, is it?" said the boy, in a tone that puzzled his hearer.

"Yes," she replied; "I love my cousins dearly."

"Do you? Well, I hate mine," he said, fiercely, "and they hate me."

"Oh! don't, please don't!" implored Maud, very much shocked. "Indeed, you shouldn't say that."

"Why not? It's true," he replied; "and you would hate them fast enough if you were me,—if you were always grudged everything for the sake of the pretty darlings, and if you had to wear out their old clothes like a beggar, as I do. Look here!" and he held up his arm, to show how thin and worn his jacket-sleeve was. Tiger saw the gesture, and came bounding up the bank, stopping to shake off the wet, and send a shower of drops over the young mistress he wished to defend.

"O Tiger, Tiger!" cried Maud, laughing; "lie down, you naughty old fellow! Don't bark in that ridiculous way. Nobody is going to hurt me, you foolish old creature. Here!" and she snatched up a bit of stick and flung it into the water, where Tiger was soon to be seen, wading happily among the reeds.

"Why, that dog cares for you more than anybody ever did for me," said the boy, bitterly, as Maud turned towards him again. "'Get out!' and 'Go along with you!' are about the best words I ever get in a day. Sometimes I think I'll run away and see if anything better is to be found, only I should just catch it if Uncle Short got hold of me again."

The little girl was almost frightened at the boy's tone and manner; but pity was still stronger than fear, and she said, in a timid voice—

“Don’t you ever go to school now?”

“Never,” he answered. “You couldn’t understand how it has all been. I went to school while my father was alive; but when he died, they found out he’d been very extravagant, and owed money to ever so many people. Uncle Short could hardly let me starve, so he took me into his house; but he never liked my being thrown upon his charity. Precious *charity* it has been, I can tell you. You’d throw a bone to that dog with kinder words than my uncle ever gives me.”

“Poor boy!” said Maud, not able to imagine how anybody could live without love and kindness; “poor boy! I am very sorry for you. I can’t bear to think of anybody being so unhappy;” and, as she spoke, tears came into her eyes.

“Oh! never mind,” he said, gruffly; “don’t distress yourself about me. I shall be bigger before long, and then I mean to run away to sea; or, if I can’t do that, I shall enlist as a drummer-boy. Look here!” and he seized two pieces of stick that were lying on the grass near him; “I

am for ever practising the tattoo, and I can almost do it now. See, this is the way it goes."

He rapped his knee with the sticks in a manner that seemed to Maud wonderfully quick; but still she thought the prospects he suggested were not very cheerful, and she told him so.

"Never you mind," he replied. "I'll make my way yet. There's many a brave fellow I've read of, that has done very well, after as dismal a beginning as mine."

"I don't think they would have done *that*; do you?" Maud said, timidly, as she pointed to the fishing-lines. The boy coloured, and seemed about to make an angry reply, but checked himself and smiled.

"You said it was poaching, didn't you?" he said. "Well! I won't be a poacher any more;" and he jumped up, crossed the stream, pulled the lines out of the water, and, rolling them into a ball, threw them as far as he could, into the depths of the grove. Then returning to his former position, he said—

"I hope you're satisfied now. I promise you I won't poach any more, either here or anywhere else. Are you glad?"

"Thank you," Maud replied; "I am very glad. I wish I was wise enough to talk to you, or do anything to help you."

"Oh, if you were wise, I don't suppose you'd have anything to say to me. I'm so often told that I'm bad, and ungrateful, and idle, that I suppose it's true. I don't want to be idle, though. If I might only go to school, wouldn't I laugh at those stupid cousins of mine! There's one that cries over his sums like a great girl, and another thought Timbuctoo was in South America. I know more than they do, any day."

Maud was not clever at sums, nor did she know where Timbuctoo was to be found, so she felt rather impressed by her companion's speech. It was new to her to think of lessons as a pleasure and a privilege. She looked upon them rather as a necessary evil than anything else, and her cousins at Williton had been of the same opinion.

"Do you really like lessons?" she asked, at length.

"Yes; some of them;" replied the boy; "and of course I'd rather learn things, like a gentleman, than run messages and be driven about, just like a pig."

"I don't think a pig could run on messages," said Maud, smiling, "unless it was the learned pig, that grandpapa tells me could say its lessons so much better than I can. But don't they let you have any books to read?"

"I don't ask if they'll let me," he answered; "but I just take the books out of the book-case, and bring them out with me. I've got one now, and I was going to read it, you know, when I'd set those lines you didn't like."

He took a volume from his jacket-pocket, and put it into her hand. It was the life of Charles the Twelfth, of whom Maud had never heard, and she said so.

"Don't you know about him?" said the boy; "oh! he was a capital fellow for fighting. I like to read about battles. I've read about Cyrus and Alexander the Great. It's grand to read about those Greeks, how they fought for their country, and would never give in."

"Should you like to be a soldier?" asked Maud.

"Shouldn't I, that's all! And so I will be, one of these days,—a soldier or a sailor, I don't mind which. I've read about Nelson, and Hood,

and Collingwood; and all the fine fellows, too, that have been to the North Pole. I shouldn't mind being a sailor. I'll run away, when I'm a little older, and be a ship's boy."

Maud feared this notion of running away was very wrong, but she did not know how to argue against it, so she determined to talk to Sir Hugh about this poor boy, as soon as the party returned from Switzerland. Meantime, she asked him to tell her his name.

"Robert Short," he answered; "Bob Short, if you like. Are you the little girl that lives at the Manor?"

"Yes," she replied; "I live at the Manor with my grandpapa, because my own father and mother are in India."

"I thought I'd seen you before," he said; "I've seen you go by our house on the way to church."

"Don't you go to church?" inquired Maud.

"Not I; I've no clothes but these, and my aunt would be ashamed of me. Talking of church —hark! don't I hear a clock?"

They listened, and heard through the still air the sound of some distant chimes.

"That must be half-past twelve," said Robert, rising hastily, "and I've a long way to go home. If I'm not in by one, I may whistle for a dinner. Good-bye. May I come here again?"

"I think you may," Maud said; "I suppose so."

She watched him as he ran across the plank and away among the trees, till she lost sight of his figure in a thicket that bounded the park on that side; then, calling Tiger to follow, she turned to walk back to the house for her own dinner. She was very thoughtful, very sorry, very much puzzled. Here was this child, more clever than herself, neglected, unloved, unhappy. He was ready to be good, if he knew how, for had he not thrown away the fishing-lines, when he felt it was wrong to set them? He wanted to learn, and he had nobody to teach him, nobody to care what became of him; and there were her cousins at Williton, hating their lessons, with every advantage within their reach. How strange, and what a pity it could not all be set right!

CHAPTER FOURTH.

AFTER dinner, Maud went to her old seat on the cedar-bough. This time she wanted to think; and Tiger, judging perhaps from her grave looks that his companionship was scarcely needed, stretched himself on the turf for a long nap. "I wish I knew how it is," she said, half aloud, after a long silence. "I have seen so many sad things lately,—my cousins so ill, and this poor boy; and then there was poor Jack."

But with the thought of Jack came the recollection of his mother's words—"The Lord knows best. It doesn't do to fret about what's good and what's bad. He knows all about it."

"The Lord knows best," repeated Maud aloud. "Yes; she said that even when her boy was taken away; but then Jack was taken to heaven, where he would never feel any pain or sorrow, where he would see Jesus. That must be best of all;" and she looked up to the pure white clouds floating across the blue sky, and thought of the white-winged angels and the white-robed saints, who were rejoicing in the presence of the Lord. "It

must be best of all to be there," repeated Maud; and then her thoughts came back to earth. "Can it be best for that poor boy to be as he is?" she continued. "Is it best for me to be petted, and to have everything I want; and for him to be so lonely, with no one to speak kindly to him? I haven't deserved to be happy a bit more than he. I wonder how it is!"

There was no one to answer little Maud's question, no one to tell her that perhaps in after life Robert would be all the better for his early hardships, all the fitter for the work it might please God to give him to do. So she went back to the poor bathing-woman's words, "God knows best;" and as she dwelt upon them, a sense of loving trust came over her. He who when on earth took children in His arms and blessed them, would not forget the orphan boy.

The next day was Sunday, but Mrs. Thompson would not allow Maud to go to church. She stayed with the little girl in the morning, making her read the prayers and learn her collect; but in the afternoon, when she went to church herself, she gave the child leave to go out. Maud took her little Bible and Prayer-book, and set off for

the stream, followed by Tiger. She had little hope of finding Robert there so late, but as she reached the neighbourhood of the stream, she saw that he was lying on the grass, reading so intently that he did not hear her coming. He did not move until Tiger's cold nose touched his hand, and then he started as if from a dream.

"Tiger is friendly to-day," said Maud, taking her seat under a tree.

"You've been a long time coming," said the boy. "I thought you'd be going to church this morning, and I hid at the end of the garden to watch for you. When I saw the people go by without you, I fancied you might be here, so I came to look for you, and I've been here ever since, except just when I ran home to dinner."

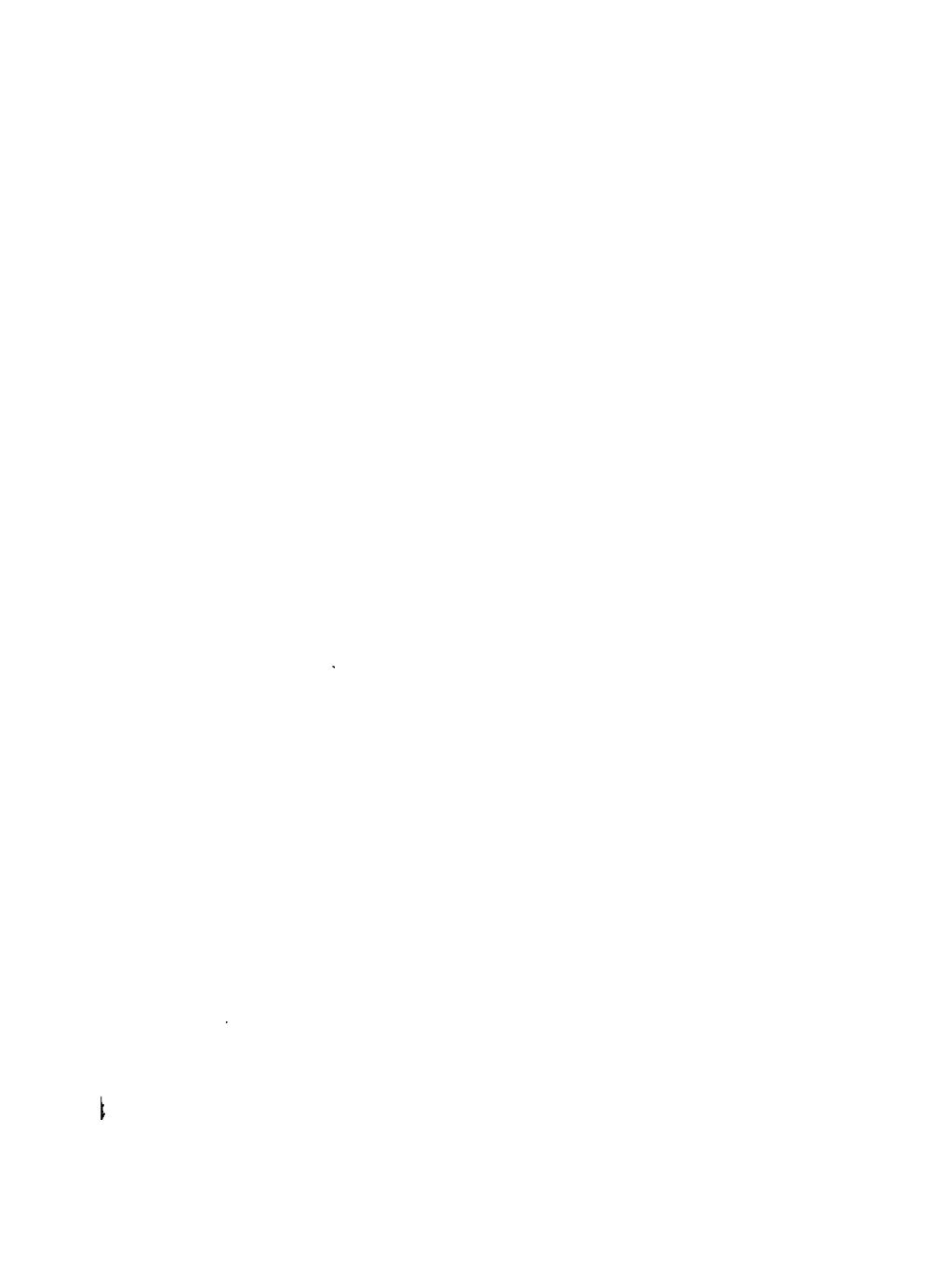
"What were you reading?" inquired Maud. "You seemed very deep in your book when I came."

"So I was," he replied. "It's the Pilgrim's Progress. My aunt gave it to one of my cousins to read on Sundays, and he forgot all about it, so I brought it out. It's a famous book, isn't it? I was in the middle of Christian's fight with Apollyon, and I hardly knew what to make of Tiger, when I found him close to me."



MAUD AND ROBERT.

Page 170.



"I am glad you have got such a nice Sunday book," said Maud; "but I am sorry you did not go to church."

"That's good, now," he answered, "when you didn't go yourself."

"Mrs. Thompson wouldn't let me go," said Maud.

"Oh! I forgot you were a witch; I suppose she was afraid you'd poison all the people."

"I don't think I'm a witch," said Maud, smiling; "but she thought I had better not go, so I read the prayers at home with her."

"What books have you got there?" asked Robert.

"My Bible and Prayer-book," replied Maud. "I thought I would read the evening psalms and lessons out-of-doors. Would you like me to read them out loud?" she continued, very timidly.

"If you like," he answered. "I daresay, now, you think I haven't got a book like that, but I have, all the same;" and he took out of his pocket a small volume, marked Church Services. "There, you see. You needn't think you're the only person that reads good books."

"Indeed, I didn't think so," said Maud, very much distressed. "Please, don't say that!"

" You might well think so, I'm sure," he said, in a very different tone; " at least, you might well think *I* never read them ; and indeed, I don't very often. But you said something about church yesterday, and that made me ashamed, and put me in mind of the good things I used to learn ; so I hunted for this when I went home, and brought it out with me this morning. I'd half a mind to go to church. If I'd seen you go, I think I should have had courage to follow. But I waited, looking for you, till it was too late, and then I came here."

" Oh ! do pray go next Sunday, whether they let me go or not," cried Maud, eagerly. " I'm sure you would be happier if you went. You wouldn't feel so lonely there. I wish you could have heard how Aunt Addy talked to me about it the other day. She said that when we were all praying together to ' Our Father,' it must make us feel kindly towards others, as if we were all members of one family. Nobody could feel deserted there, because they would be reminded how they all belonged to one Lord. Pray go next Sunday, will you ? "

" I'll see ; perhaps I may," answered Robert,

"but I can't tell till the time comes. Did you say you were going to read out loud?"

"I will, if you like," answered Maud. "Won't you read the Psalms with me?"

"I'd rather listen to you," he said; and Maud was obliged to be content. It was the fifth of the month, and as she read the twenty-seventh Psalm, the boy's eyes were fixed eagerly on her face, and he seemed to be listening as if the words were a special message to himself. When she had finished all the psalms for the day, and was closing her prayer-book, he said, "Thank you! I liked the first one best. What was that at the end, about tarrying?"

Maud opened her book again and read—

"'O tarry thou the Lord's leisure: be strong and he shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.' Let us try if we can learn it by heart;" and she read it again.

"I can say it," said the boy; and he did so with perfect correctness. Presently Maud was able to do so too, and then she proceeded to read the lessons for the day. She could not tell whether the boy attended to them. He was pulling up clods and casting them into the

stream, where Tiger seemed to be enjoying himself; but he did not interrupt her by a word, and she hoped he was listening. They were both silent for some time after she ceased to read, and then the boy said—

“Do you always live at the Manor with old Sir Hugh? I haven’t seen him for a long time.”

“He is gone abroad,” answered Maud; “they are all gone to Switzerland, and I am alone with the servants at the Manor. When grandpapa comes back, I mean to tell him about you. He is so much wiser than I am, that perhaps he could help you in some way.”

“Don’t go bothering him about me,” answered Robert, in his gruffest tone. “I’m nothing to him, and he won’t want to hear anything at all about me. I can take care of myself.”

Maud was silenced for a time, and there was no sound but the angry snort of old Tiger, as he grubbed into the bank in search of an imaginary rat. By and bye the boy spoke again—

“Didn’t you say you had some cousins?”

Maud was delighted to tell him of her relations at Williton, and the happy days they had passed together by the sea. She then spoke of

poor Jack's death, which greatly interested her hearer.

"It's like one of my old story-books," he said, "to hear how you go on. You never could think how different it is where I live. There's wrangling, and scolding, and grumbling, all day long; and double allowance on Sundays, because uncle's at home. Then you know I am but a kind of servant. I have to go to the farm over there, to fetch the milk every morning, and after that to the village for the letters. Then, if there's anything wanted any time in the day, the cry is, 'Where's Bob, where's that lazy, idle boy?' and off I'm sent for a pennyworth of mutton, or a pound of plums. As to my cousins, they're not much like yours. They'd dearly like to kick and cuff me if they could, but they're such cowards they don't dare. I'm a match for them all, and they know it."

It was certainly a dismal picture of home life, and Maud condoled with the boy, and suggested such scraps of comfort as occurred to her, though she said no more of the intention she still cherished of referring the subject to kind old Sir Hugh.

"I am afraid I must go now," she said, at length, rising from her mossy seat. "Mrs. Thompson will be looking for me. Perhaps I shall meet you here again sometimes."

"I'll come again for the chance," said Robert. "I don't know what your name is, but I think I shall call you Mercy," and he smiled as he held up the Pilgrim's Progress.

"My name is Maud Clavell," said the little girl, smiling also; then, calling Tiger to follow her, she bade the boy good-bye, and returned to the house. The same evening, as she sat with the good housekeeper, who was able on this day of rest to give more attention to the little girl, Maud spoke of her meeting with Robert Short, and of the conversations she had held with him. Mrs. Thompson was rather dismayed at the news.

"I don't know how your grandma would like your making such friends with the child, Miss Maud," she said. "He may be a good boy, but I see him running in the village sometimes, looking more like a little beggar than a companion for a young lady like you."

"Oh!" pleaded Maud; "but indeed he wants

to be a good boy, and he loves learning lessons.
Do let me go and meet him sometimes!"

"Well, really, dear," replied Mrs. Thompson, "I hardly think I ought to let you go again till your grandmama comes home. I'll tell you what I'll do," she continued, good-naturedly, at sight of Maud's look of distress. "I'll go with you next time you go to the stream. That will do, won't it? I know that Mrs. Short has the name of being a scold, and those boys of hers are bearish ill-tempered creatures; so, may be, this child is put upon. We'll see, Miss Maud."

The next day, however, and the next after that were very wet, and Maud was a prisoner to the house. Wednesday morning rose, bright and cloudless, but she could not enjoy it. Her head ached, and all strength seemed gone from her limbs. She could not rise from her bed; she could scarcely reply when Mrs. Thompson came to call her. Little Maud was very ill. The fever was come.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

Ten days had passed, and two carriages were rolling at rapid pace along the gravel-road towards Haildon Manor. Sir Hugh and his family had returned, having heard only on their arrival at Dover of Maud's illness. It was a sad coming-home for them all ; and Mrs. Thompson looked very grave as she met them at the hall-door, with the news that her little patient was not better.

" May I go to her ? " asked Lady Clavell.

" O yes," was the reply ; " she knows nobody, so it cannot do her any harm."

It was sad indeed to see the flushed cheeks and restless eyes, and to hear the voice, shrill and harsh now, rambling on in unmeaning sentences. Lady Clavell took the little hand in hers, but Maud still talked on unheeding.

" The afternoon is the worst time," said Mrs. Thompson ; " the fever goes off in the evening, my lady, and I daresay she'll know you then."

Mrs. Thompson was right. In the evening the red colour had faded from Maud's cheeks, the eyes looked dim and sunken, but the child knew

the dear faces that bent over her. Almost too weak to utter a sound, she yet smiled a welcome ; and when she fell asleep, it was with her hand clasped in Sir Hugh's.

There was very little change for several days ; and then, if any, it was for the worse. Sir Hugh's voice trembled as he entreated, in prayers with his family and household, that God would spare the life of his darling, and the three aunts were almost broken-hearted. The uncles were far away ; Major Clavell had parted with his family in Switzerland, to rejoin his regiment at Malta ; and the other was in Germany. The Manor-house was sad enough now, but there seemed yet a hope of Maud's recovery. The doctor said her own patience and gentleness would help her much ; the fear was that her strength would fail. There came a day at last when there was just a shade of improvement, so trifling that those who loved her scarcely dared whisper of it to each other. Then a whole afternoon passed without the usual fever fit ; and, for the first time since his return, Sir Hugh left the house and strolled up and down the terrace, with thanksgiving in his heart. The next day, the improvement continued ;

Maud's weakness was extreme, but she slept a great deal and took nourishment. There was every hope that she would do well. She had evidently known her danger; for one night when Lady Clavell was unable to restrain her tears as she kissed the child, Maud feebly caressed the wet cheeks with her little hand, and whispered, "God knows best, dear grannie. If I go, please say to dear papa and mama that God knows best."

When the child was really in a fair way to recover, Sir Hugh resumed his old habits of riding and walking. Strolling one day in his own grounds with old Tiger—a great pet now for Maud's sake—he was startled by the sudden appearance, from behind some bushes, of a boy carrying a basket; and surprised to see that Tiger, usually resentful towards intruders, greeted this one as an old acquaintance. Before Sir Hugh could speak, the boy addressed him.

"Is she better, sir?" he said eagerly. "She isn't going to die, is she?"

"Who, my little man?" said Sir Hugh.

"Maud Clavell," replied the boy, still further astonishing Sir Hugh.

"She is better, thank God!" he said; "we hope she will recover. But who are you, and what do you know about my grand-daughter?"

"I know she was kind to me," said the boy, looking down and kicking awkwardly at a stone. "I don't get so many kind words as to be likely to forget hers. Will you give her a message for me?" he continued, looking up. "Will you be sure and remember it?"

"What message is it?" asked Sir Hugh.

"Tell her I've kept my word," was the reply; "and be sure to tell her I've been to church every Sunday since she told me. And say, please" (and here the voice was hoarse and trembling), "say I'm very, very glad she's not going to die."

His agitation was catching, and for some moments old Sir Hugh could not speak. At last he said: "I don't know how you can have known my little Maud, but I thank you for your goodwill. We have all been very unhappy about her, we could not bear to lose our darling; and God has mercifully spared her. She is very patient, but it will be a long time before her little feet have strength to trip along beside me, as they

used to do. She is very weak—very, very weak—my little Maud."

Sir Hugh was almost thinking aloud, and hardly remembered the boy's presence. He was reminded of it by a touch upon his hand, to call his attention. "Look here," said the boy: and Sir Hugh saw that he held a basket of rushes, rudely plaited together, and that within it, laid on grass, were two small speckled trout, freshly caught.

"Would you mind taking these?" continued the boy, as he again covered the fish with grass. "I want you to give them to her, and say I caught them for her. But you must be sure to tell her I caught them in the mill-stream, and the miller lent me his rod on purpose. Don't forget, please, because she'd be vexed if she thought I'd been catching them where I had no business to fish."

Sir Hugh took the little green basket, and in a moment, without staying for further questions, the boy had fled. Sir Hugh returned to the house with his prize, and went softly up to the sickroom.

"What have you brought me, grandpapa?" asked Maud's weak voice.

Sir Hugh sat on the bed, and lifted enough of the grass to show the pretty speckled fish.

"They are for you, little Maud," said Sir Hugh; "but I can't tell who sent them, for I don't know his name. It was a shabby little boy, who sent you a great many messages as well as the fish. I was to tell you the miller lent him a rod on purpose to catch these trout for you in the mill-stream. He told me to be sure to tell you this."

Maud feebly clapped her hands. "Go on, grandpapa. It does me good to hear it."

"I was to say further," said Sir Hugh, "that the young gentleman had gone to church every Sunday since you told him."

"Good news, grandpapa! Please go on."

"I was to tell my little Maud," he continued, stooping to kiss her, "that this friend of hers was very, very glad to hear she was getting better."

"Poor boy!" said Maud, almost crying; "how good of him! Please be kind to him, grandpapa. It will help him to be good and patient, if you will say a kind word to him. His name is Short—Robert Short."

"Hush!" interrupted Lady Clavell. "My

little girl must not get excited. You must tell grandpapa another time. Lie still, my darling."

"Yes, grannie," she answered, laying her eager face again on the pillow, with a smile. "Mrs. Thompson can tell grandpapa about the poor boy, but please be kind to him."

"That I will, my little woman, for your sake," said Sir Hugh. "Be quite easy; and meantime I will go to Mrs. Thompson at once, and tell her to send these fish up for my little Maud's dinner;" and away went Sir Hugh, still carrying his green basket. The housekeeper repeated all that she remembered of her conversation with Maud about Robert Short; and Sir Hugh determined to watch for the boy, and question him, when next he should venture into the park. Lady Clavell saw Maud smile to herself as she lay quiet, after Sir Hugh's visit, and noticed that the dinner that day gave special satisfaction.

The next day, at the same hour as before, Sir Hugh walked towards the stream; and again, starting up from behind the same bushes, Robert stood before him. Sir Hugh held out his hand,

but the boy did not attempt to take it. He only said hastily—

“ Is she better? Did you tell her?”

“ Yes, I told her,” was the answer, “ and she was very much pleased. She is better to-day. She liked the fish more than she has liked any food since her illness, and she bade me thank you for them, and say how very glad your message had made her. Won’t you shake hands with me?” continued Sir Hugh, when the boy turned away, as if to leave him. Robert gave his hand somewhat unwillingly. One of the fingers was tied up, and Sir Hugh asked—

“ How did this happen? Have you hurt yourself since yesterday?”

“ Oh, it’s nothing,” he replied; “ I was cutting the wood and the hatchet slipped, that’s all.”

“ What business had a little fellow like you to be using a hatchet?” said Sir Hugh.

“ Me? Why, I cut up all the small wood for the house always. I don’t often cut myself.”

“ Well, my man, come to the house with me,” Sir Hugh said, “ and Mrs. Thompson shall put some court-plaster on the cut. It will be less in your way than this great bundle of rag.”

They walked to the house together, and the wound was soon dressed.

"Now come into my library," said Sir Hugh; "I'll show you my books."

The boy's eyes glistened at sight of the well-filled shelves, and he was soon led to talk of what he had read, showing much quickness and good memory. Sir Hugh was pleased.

"Now come and sit down by me," he said at last, "and let us talk a little about yourself."

But the boy's manner changed at once.

"I didn't come for that," he muttered gruffly. "I asked her not to tell you anything about me. I didn't come for anything of that sort. Let me go home now."

"I know you came for nothing but kindness to my little Maud," replied Sir Hugh, "and I am very much obliged to you, because you have given her pleasure; but you must let me be your friend too. My little girl always tells me her adventures and her wishes, and she asked me to be your friend, now that she cannot see you."

"I don't want anything," repeated Robert.

"I think you want some one to teach you,"

Sir Hugh said, smiling. "I think you would like to go to school."

The boy's face brightened. "That I should," he answered. "Here am I, ten years old, and I don't know how to write. Isn't it a shame, sir, a cruel shame," and his face flushed crimson, "that I shouldn't be taught to write? My poor father might be extravagant, but he was a gentleman; I'm sure, twenty thousand times more of a gentleman than my mean stingy uncle!"

"We won't talk about this, my man," said Sir Hugh, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder; "but if you want to learn to write, I will find a way. Come here again to-morrow, and I will see what can be done, if you really mean what you say." The boy nodded, took up his old cap, and departed, while Sir Hugh went to his daughters to discuss plans for assisting his young visitor.

"Do you know, papa," said Edith, "there was a boy named Robert Short at school with George. He used to come here for a holiday with George sometimes, and I know his father was a banker at Haldon. He must have been the father of this poor boy, I think."

"Ah, yes, I remember," said Sir Hugh, "a tall slight boy with dark hair. We lost sight of him afterwards, and I fancy George said he was gone to India. This present banker was an elder brother, whom we never knew. I've heard he's a quarrelsome, disagreeable fellow, but I must try what can be done with him. There's good in the boy, I'm sure."

"Let us try him," said Adelaide. "I will devote two hours a day to his instruction, if he will come to me, and we shall soon see whether he really means to be diligent."

"Very good," rejoined her father. "If he comes steadily, and you make a satisfactory report of him at Christmas, I will put him to school afterwards, and give him such assistance as I can towards his making his own way in the world."

The plan was laid before Robert when he made his appearance the following day. He was very gruff at first, and declared he didn't want anybody's help, he didn't come for that. Adelaide, however, led him away to the room in which she was accustomed to teach Maud; and after a little playful argument and a few hints on the value of learning, he was won over to agree to the arrange-

ment. He could always come in the afternoon, he said, after he had done chopping the wood. No one ever interfered with him or cared whether he went, after his day's work. The first writing-lesson was given forthwith. Very hard work it was, with the stiff, sunburnt, awkward fingers; but Adelaide only made merry at his blunders, and assured him he would soon do better, otherwise he would almost have despaired. The writing-lesson over, they had a long talk, in which Adelaide discovered that her pupil, in his irregular studies, had gathered and stored away in his memory a great amount of information, and that to teach him would be no idle task. They parted mutually pleased with each other; and little Maud's face grew very bright when Aunt Addy told her the result of the morning's consultation.

Maud's recovery was sure, but very slow. The horse-chestnuts that looked great pyramids of green when she began to be ill, were leafless before she could be carried downstairs, and the shadow of the cedars fell black on the snow-covered lawn. But she kept Christmas happily with those she loved, in the great drawing-room

of the Manor, even with Uncle George, whose regiment had been unexpectedly ordered home in the autumn. There was a guest, too, besides the family party. It was poor little Robert Short, who had won his reward by steady attention to Adelaide's teaching, and was to go to school at Sir Hugh's expense soon after the beginning of the new year. He was very seldom gruff now: kindness had softened his manners, and he had learned to accept with a good grace the friendship that was offered to him for Maud's sake and his father's. Sir Hugh had managed matters so well with Robert's uncle, that the boy was supplied with better food and better clothes than when Maud first made his acquaintance; and Mr. Short had been brought to see the necessity of providing himself with a servant to go on errands and cut wood, instead of employing his nephew for such offices. Better days had indeed come for little Robert; and, the Lord helping him, he was determined to show he was not ungrateful.

Maud was very quiet, very glad at heart. She was getting well, she had good news from India, she had loving faces round her, and Robert Short had won his way to Sir Hugh's kind heart. Who

could have been happier that day than Maud Clavell?

"I know you again when you smile, Maud," said her uncle George, as he sat down beside her, "I know you are my dear niece still, but I shall never see 'little Maud' again, never see the little fairy I parted with on the doorstep of the cottage at Williton. She is gone away for evermore!"

It was true that Maud had grown very tall during her illness, but she had still the same peaceful heart, the same happy smile. There was nothing to regret, though she might be "little Maud" no longer.



DAYLEFORD WINDMILL.



DAYLEFORD WINDMILL is placed on the edge of a flat and furzy common, raised but a few feet above the level of the sea. The miller's cottage, with its garden and orchard, nestles behind the mill, which protects it from the heavy storms that in winter time come sweeping over the water. Inland, beyond the common, are wide corn-fields, and then meadows, through which a slow river creeps to the shore, while a low line of hills bounds the view. Sewards, the sands, firm and pleasant to the tread, stretch at low water to the width of half a mile or more, their smooth surface varied here and there with a lump of dark weed-grown rock, a larger mass of which, at the extremest edge, shows itself for an hour or two when the tide runs out. The shore slopes

gradually away to the right and left, the mill being placed on the most projecting point, in order to catch every breath of wind.

The mill has been owned by the same family for many generations, a sturdy honest God-fearing race, gradually dwindling in numbers till, thirty or forty years ago, there remained of the Wrays of Dayleford only worthy John Wray, the miller, and his little son. The miller was a large cheerful man with a rosy face, that shone through the flour-dust like the red sun through a mist. He had married a quiet little woman who had been for many years nurse in the family of Sir Bevil Norman, at the great white castle gleaming on the wooded hills far away ; and she had been so beloved by her nurslings there, that whenever the family were at the castle, the young ladies and gentlemen would ride over to see her, and taste the apples or other little delicacies that had been laid by for some such joyful occasion.

Johnnie Wray, the son of this good couple, was more like his father than his mother. Bold and fearless, and full of wild spirits, he early learnt to climb about the mill, and needed many a warning to avoid the dangers of the machinery.

He loved to hear the spinning of the wheels and the rush of the great vanes in the sea-breeze, and to watch the white stream of flour pouring down into the bin. He shouted with delight when, to all the noises within the mill, was added the roar of the waves leaping higher and higher on the sands below. More joyful still did he feel, if, looking from the window, he saw flat barges making their way at high-water to the shore, bringing sacks of corn which by and bye the bargemen carried up the ricketty ladder with many a loud joke. Much haste was needful, if they were to re-load their boats with sacks of flour, that were piled in readiness for them; else the tide would fall and leave them high and dry on the shore. Now and then came carts from inland farms; and, better still, once a week the miller himself drove his light cart to the town, ten miles off, and if the weather were fine, Johnnie accompanied him, and often Mrs. Wray also. Those were glorious days; for the shops of the little country town seemed grand and beautiful to Johnnie, and he was content to wait any length of time while his mother made her purchases, so long as she would let him stand at the window of

the toyshop, with its wealth of gay balls and tops, or at the watchmaker's, where he would note with puzzled brain that all the clocks and watches pointed to a different hour, and amuse himself with wondering which was the true one. On the way home, stowed safely among the packages in the cart, and perhaps with a huge bun in his hand, Johnnie would fall asleep, and not open his eyes again till his father lifted him out, and carried him across the garden and into the cosy cottage.

On these occasions the mill was left in charge of old Blake, the miller's man, who had belonged to the place before John Wray was born, and who seldom went many yards from its walls, except on Sunday, when with well-brushed coat and sleek hair, he made his way to the nearest church, three miles off. Hale and active, old Blake was a treasure to the family, for, besides his work in the mill, he found time to dig in the garden, to attend to the horse in the shed beside the cottage, and to do any odd jobs for his mistress, or for Johnnie. Nothing came amiss to him, and his true and faithful service made his employers feel a great regard for the old man,

a feeling in which Johnnie cordially shared. By the time the child was ten years old, he had learned to be very useful about the place. He could rake the beds and pick off the stones when Blake had been digging; he could lead Paddy the horse across the common to drink at the clear pool; he could wind up the bucket from the moss-grown well in the garden for his mother, and help her in the house-work; and his father would give him many a task in the mill, so that he might learn to be a miller before his turn should come. So came round the tenth winter of Johnnie's life, a cold winter, with stormy winds, but not much snow before Christmas.

Work at the mill ceased early now, and the family met round the blazing hearth in the cottage, not forgetting old Blake, who however crept away early to his bed in the corner of the lowest chamber in the mill. These long evenings were pleasant times. Often the miller or his wife would read aloud for a while, and as it grew later and old Blake disappeared, and John Wray fell asleep in his arm-chair, Johnnie would creep closer to his mother and ask her to tell him over and over again stories of the ladies and gentle-

men at the castle. He was never weary of hearing how Master Bevil and Master Philip had played mischievous tricks upon their nurse, or how Miss Adela and Miss Emmeline had been alarmed by a wild stag. He knew them all, gay ladies and gentlemen now, riding on beautiful horses and prancing at his mother's gate. He had watched them shyly from his hiding-place in the mill many a time, when the summer sun was shining, and next summer surely they would come again.

But now it was sharp wintry weather, and the family were not at the castle. One morning, when the weather was finer than usual, John Wray was going to drive to the town, and Johnnie begged to go too. There was not much fear that the cold would hurt his sturdy frame, so his mother wrapped comforters and great-coats about him, and let him accompany his father, who promised to return before dark. Old Blake was busy in the mill, and Mrs. Wray was glad to feel she had a quiet day before her, to set her drawers in order, and to answer a letter that Miss Adela had written her from London. By mid-day, however, most of the work was done, and

the bright sunshine tempted her to stroll into the garden. The sun felt warm under the bare elder-bushes, but there were icicles hanging about the well, and the air was full of frost in the shade. Mrs. Wray hoped her husband would keep his promise of returning early, and meantime she walked to the gate and looked out over the common, now all dry and brown, except for the dark tufts of furze scattered over its surface. She had stood there, listening to the beat of the rising tide and the hum of the wind in the sails of the mill, till she felt chilled and ready to return to the fireside, when suddenly there came in sight a young woman with a baby in her arms. The common had seemed so utterly lonely but a moment before, that Mrs. Wray started at sight of the stranger, but, with her natural gentle politeness, instantly began to murmur an apology. The young woman paused at the gate and looked wistfully into Mrs. Wray's face, and the look was returned with some curiosity, for the stranger's appearance was striking and uncommon. She was tall and dark, with black hair and eyes, and over her head she wore, instead of bonnet, a gaily striped shawl, fastened with a gold brooch.

under her chin. The rest of her dress was dark and simple, and the baby in her arms was closely wrapped up in a thick brown cloak. At first Mrs. Wray thought she must be a gipsy, only that she hardly looked like one who had lived a wild life out of doors, and her manner was timid and gentle. Mrs. Wray was the first to speak. " You look tired," she said ; " have you travelled far this cold day ? "

The voice that replied was very sweet, but the words it spoke were quite unintelligible. The miller's wife shook her head to show she could not understand, and the stranger's dark eyes filled with tears. Mrs. Wray felt very sorry, and pointed to the baby. Her gesture was understood, for, smiling brightly through her tears, the young woman lifted a corner of the cloak, and showed a little face, not like her own, but with English blue eyes and flaxen hair. The sight went to Mrs. Wray's heart. Once, years ago now, Johnnie had had a little sister, who after a few months was taken away, and only spoken of afterwards when, in the twilight, the mother whispered to Johnnie of his little sister in heaven. So the first impulse on seeing the

pretty baby's face, was to throw open the gate and invite the stranger to come in and rest by the fireside. Soon she was seated in the miller's great arm-chair, and the child, freed from its heavy cloak, sat up on its mother's knee and gazed with calm round eyes at the dancing flame. Mrs. Wray placed food on the table for the mother, and warmed some bread and milk for the child, who made no murmur when she took it in her own kind arms, but allowed her to feed it, looking up in her face all the time, steadily, and without any fear. Then she tenderly chafed the little rosy feet, as she sat on a low stool before the fire, and lifted the little hands to her lips, as if it had been her own darling. The stranger looked on with a smile, and presently knelt down on the hearth. The two women were growing friendly over the unconscious child, and beginning to understand each other.

"How old is she?" said Mrs. Wray, "one year?" and she held up one finger. She was puzzled, for the little creature was very small, and yet she did not think it looked like a very young infant. The stranger seemed to understand, for she shook her head, and then held up

two fingers, saying some word that sounded like February.

"She is a tiny fairy," said Mrs. Wray. "What do you call her? what name?"

She was understood, perhaps more by her signs than her words, but the woman answered—

"Dora Mercedès, Salvadorá Mercedès;" and then bending over the child, she spoke rapidly in a language so rich and sweet, that Mrs. Wray described it afterwards as being like church-music.

"I wish I could understand the poor thing," said the good miller's wife, as the stranger took back her baby and began wrapping it again in its warm cloak. Then, after many a word and sign, she thought she could make out something of the poor woman's story, especially when the latter produced from her bosom a written paper, which seemed to have been given to her as a guide for her travels. The last place named in the list was Hargate, a seaport town some fifteen miles from Dayleford windmill; the first was Lowton, thirty miles in the opposite direction. At the bottom of the paper was written, "Ask for the ship 'Harold' at Hargate." It seemed to Mrs. Wray that the

poor woman was the wife of an English sailor, and had been married to him in some foreign port; that she had come home with her child, and landed at Lowton, whence she was journeying by her husband's desire to meet him at Hargate. It was very clear that the husband was expected in the "Harold," and that his wife was very eager to see him. All this had been explained, and now the stranger was moving to depart, having kissed Mrs. Wray's hands, much to the good woman's surprise, and spoken in tones of unmistakable gratitude in her sweet foreign language.

"I only wish John was at home," said Mrs. Wray aloud in her perplexity; "if they had only come this morning, he could have driven them as far as Chorlby, and then they'd have had but five miles to go."

She tried to explain that she wished the poor wayfarers to stay till the morrow, and she was understood; but the young woman gently put aside the hand that would have detained her, and pointing to the name of Chorlby in her list, made signs she must get there before night. Much troubled, for all this time her interest and regard

had been increasing from moment to moment, Mrs. Wray opened the door and looked out. It was but two o'clock, and there was no chance of the miller's return yet; but, oh! joyful sight, there was farmer Brown's large waggon leaving some empty sacks at the mill. Mrs. Wray went out to speak to the waggoner.

"Where are you going, William?" she asked; "I see you have all your team to-day, as if you were going a long way."

"So I am, ma'am," he replied; "I just came round this way to leave the sacks, and now I'm to take these barrels of potatoes to Hargate, to be put on board the schooner 'Mary Ann.'"

"To Hargate!" repeated Mrs. Wray joyfully; then, slipping a little money into the man's hand, she continued; "I want you to take this poor traveller to Hargate in the waggon. I'm sure farmer Brown would be glad to help her. She's a sailor's wife, going to meet her husband, but she comes from foreign parts, and can't speak English. Can you make room for her?"

"Surely, ma'am," answered the waggoner; and he had soon cleared a cosy place lined with hay, where the poor stranger might sit with her

baby, sheltered by the thick canvas roof from the cold air. All was ready, and Mrs. Wray, after one last look at the child, tried to slip a trifle into the mother's hand, but it was gently put back, and the stranger showed a purse that was not badly filled. Presently the great waggon was moving away across the common, and the tinkling of the bells on the horses' collars died away in the distance. Mrs. Wray went into her snugly thatched cottage and sat down by the fire, thinking of the blue-eyed child, and was quite taken by surprise when, an hour later, the cart stopped at the gate, and the miller's gay voice called to her to come and help Johnnie down. There was plenty to hear and to say then of all the day's events; but in the quiet of the evening, while the miller dozed in his arm-chair, on that day and many a day afterwards, Johnnie's mother told him the story of the poor foreign woman who had gone away to Hargate in Farmer Brown's waggon, with a baby on her knee like his little sister in heaven.

The miller laughed good-humouredly at his wife for her interest in the stranger, but he took care to ascertain for her that the waggoner had

taken his charge to Hargate, and found a respectable lodging for her ; and that the " Harold " was daily expected when the waggon left the place. As to the woman's name, it was still a mystery.

" I asked her to tell it to me," said Mrs. Wray, " and I made out easily enough that her Christian name was Mercedès, the same as the child's second name ; but the surname was such a queer-sounding word, I could make nothing of it. It was something like Eyoll, only I never heard of any English person being called that. Perhaps she didn't know how to pronounce it, though she said mine quite right. She laughed and shook her head when I gave her a pencil to write it."

Christmas came and went with gloomy weather, and bitter winds sweeping over the lead-coloured sea. By and bye the distant hills were covered with snow, and the river was frozen hard and fast ; then the white covering spread over the plain, down to the very edge of the sands. Such severe cold had not been felt for years. It was all the same to Johnnie. He rather liked the cold, especially when his father, who had not much to do just now in the mill, would let him

run by his side and help to carry to the poor cottages near, some of the soup which good Mrs. Wray prepared for the old and the weak. It was the first time in Johnnie's recollection that snow had remained on the ground round the mill, and the delight of pelting with snowballs every one who approached, was new and untiring. Old Blake helped the little boy to build up a man of snow taller than himself; in short, it was a season of great enjoyment to Johnnie, who wondered why his mother cowered over the fire and longed for a change of wind, and thought her quite unkind when she expected a thaw.

"What can you be going to do, John?" asked Mrs. Wray of her husband one morning in the third week of the frost, when he came into breakfast. "I saw old Blake putting the harness on Paddy, but surely you're never thinking of going out in the cart such weather as this? There's snow falling now, and the black clouds are rolling up over the sea. It will be fearful weather before night. Hark how the wind roars."

"Very true, wife," replied the miller; "the weather is not so pleasant as it might be, and I'm a delicate little plant that needs the sunshine.

Nevertheless, at the risk of injuring my beauty, I must go out to day."

"Your beauty, father!" chuckled Johnnie, from the depths of his bread and milk.

"But, John," persisted Mrs. Wray, "don't answer me with a joke. Why should you go to-day?"

"Because it's my duty, wife, and you never stopped me in that yet. Why, one would think it was Johnnie that was going out into the storm, to see the grave face you put on. Look at me, my dear. I'm not such a very weakly fellow after all!"

Mrs. Wray could not help smiling as she glanced at the large tall figure of her husband, and his ruddy, laughing face.

"Still, I'm sorry you must go," she said. "Will you tell me where you're going?"

"Yes. I go to Fredham in the cart, and there I shall meet the coach and go on to Hargate."

"To Hargate!" repeated Mrs. Wray; "the coast road will be very bleak, John."

"Have you any commissions for Hargate?" he asked, with a gay twinkle in his eye, for he knew

the question would divert her mind from the consideration of the hardships he was about to undergo. "Shall I look out for your black-eyed friend, and ask her to let me bring little Dora Mercedès back to you?"

"Oh, do, father!" cried Johnnie.

"Oh, do, John!" exclaimed Mrs. Wray. "I mean, do ask after the poor woman, and find out if the 'Harold' is come, and if she has found her husband."

"I won't forget," replied the good-natured miller, as he rose and wrapped a heavy coat round him. "And what am I to bring you, Johnnie?"

"Bring the baby," answered Johnnie.

"I'll see," said his father, laughing; "mean-time, be a good boy and mind your mother. Here comes the cart. God bless you both!"

Johnnie would run out to see the last of his father, and Mrs. Wray followed to tie another comforter round her husband's neck. A few last directions to old Blake, and he was off. As he looked back to wave his hand, he heard his wife bid him not be late coming home, and Johnnie shriek, "Mind you bring the baby!"

Mrs. Wray hurried the boy into the house and shivered as she shut the door on the cutting wind swirling in gusts over the sea, bringing up heavy clouds that sent sudden showers of crisp snow against the window-pane. It was no light task to endeavour to amuse Johnnie indoors, especially after the late gambols in the snow. Mrs. Wray was obliged in the afternoon to agree to a compromise, and let him play in the mill. He came back to her before dusk, and they sat before the fire hand in hand, while she told him some of his favourite stories, stopping again and again to listen, in the lulls of the blast, for her husband's returning wheels.

"He'll come all right, mother," said Johnnie, a little impatient at the frequent pauses in the narrative. "Old Blake says Paddy was rough-shod yesterday, and the fresh snow would all be blown off the road. It was all smooth and hard yesterday, and so it will be to-day." Mrs. Wray went on with her story, and the twilight deepened, so that the red firelight, shining through the un-covered window, fell like a red stain on the whitened garden outside. At last she started up, crying—"I am sure I hear them now!" and at

that moment the muffled sound of wheels came near and ceased at the gate. Old Blake was there helping his master to dismount. The miller was very quiet. He only spoke once, to bid old Blake take very gently the bundle he held in his arms, while he dismounted from his seat. Mrs. Wray opened the cottage door and stood in the porch, holding Johnnie's hand to prevent his going further, and Johnnie pawed the ground like an impatient steed chafing at restraint.

"Welcome home, John!" cried his wife, as the miller unlatched the garden-gate. "We've been listening for you this hour. Whatever are you carrying so carefully?"

He had taken the bundle again from old Blake, and was bringing it towards the cottage. Johnnie leaped high in the air and shouted—

"You've brought the baby, father! You've been and brought the baby, haven't you now?"

"Hush, Johnnie," his father said, gravely, pushing him aside, and leading the way into the cottage, followed by his wife, who pulled the little boy over the threshold and closed the door. The blaze fell on the bundle, as the miller sat down in his arm-chair, after throwing off his hat and coat

in the little passage outside. Mrs. Wray shook the coat and hung it on its accustomed peg, and laid the hat on a settle to dry, then went into the snug house-place. Her husband's silence surprised her, and she began to fear she knew not what. Even Johnnie was standing open-mouthed and wondering, but quite quiet, with his eyes on his father's face, so far more grave and stern than he had ever seen it look before. Mrs. Wray joined the group, and laid her hand on the miller's shoulder.

"Why, you're quite dazed-like with the cold, John," she said; "let me make you some warm tea. Your tongue must be frozen within your teeth, for I never knew you so still before."

He looked up at her and smiled.

"Wait a bit," he said; "don't you mean 'to ask what I've brought you, Mary? I should make queer work with this bit of goods I've got here. It's all for you, my woman. Can you guess what it's like?"

Mrs. Wray looked at the bundle. It was covered with thick brown cloth. Hurriedly she knelt down on the floor, and began to open it as it lay on the miller's knee. There was something strangely familiar to her in the touch of tha-

brown cloak, and in the appearance of the gaily coloured shawl beneath it. She trembled as she lifted the latter, hardly knowing what she expected to see ; and when her eyes fell on a flaxen head and a soft, sleeping, baby face, she felt as if she were dreaming over again, one of the dreams that she had dreamt many a time since the visit of the foreign woman and her child. Johnnie roused her by exclaiming—

“ Why, he really has brought home the baby.”

“ Hush ! ” cried his mother turning upon him ; “ speak gently, and don’t wake the pretty creature, Johnnie.” Then, looking up in her husband’s face, she continued, “ What is it, John ? What does it mean ? Why did the mother let you bring this little one here ? ”

“ This poor little one has no mother or father in the wide world, Mary,” answered the miller ; “ unless you and I take her. Shall we take the little orphan to share with our Johnnie ? Shall our house be her home ”

For all answer, Mrs. Wray held out her arms and took the child, and pressed it close to her kind heart. All was done so gently that its sleep was not disturbed.

"That's right!" said the miller, rising and shaking himself; "there's the right thing in the right place for once. Whatever I may be, I'm not much of a nurse, and I'm more stiff than if I'd done a good day's work in my natural way. You might have laughed, Mary, to see me feed the little one with a big spoon at Fredham, but she made a good meal, I can tell you, and slept all the way here under the horse-rug as warm as a toast."

"But how was it, John?" asked his wife, looking up from the placid little face.

He looked troubled and turned away. "I'll tell you by and bye," he said; "when Johnnie's gone to sleep. It's a sad story."

As to Johnnie, he was silent from wonder, and a sense that something had shocked and grieved his father. He crept to his mother's knee and watched the tiny features, and gently touched the waxy fingers, while his mother whispered how tender and gentle he must be with this little one who had come to be his sister. By and bye, she laid the child in a warm corner, and bade the little boy stay beside her, while she herself laid out the supper, and prepared a bed for the stranger.

By the time all was ready, the baby opened her blue eyes, and looked round her with the same steady look that Mrs. Wray had noticed in her before. She did not cry or shrink from the strange faces, but took some warm milk and bread eagerly, and then fell asleep again. The miller and his wife sat late over the fire, talking of the day's events, and the miller thus related his adventures—

"Paddy and I got along very well as far as Fredham. I waited there ever so long for the coach, for there was a bad bit of road, they said, out Hale way, where the snow had drifted. It took us a good hour and a half to get on to Hargate, but we arrived there all safe and sound. Part of my business was at the Shipping Office; so, as soon as I had done, I asked the clerk there if the 'Harold' had come in yet. 'The 'Harold'?' said he; 'havn't you heard about the 'Harold'?' 'No,' I said, 'never a word.' 'Why,' said he, 'she went down with all hands in the gale last Tuesday week. The 'Betsy' came in the next morning with the news. The captain of the 'Betsy' told me he spoke the 'Harold' the day before, but the weather was fearful. The 'Betsy' was within a hair's-breadth of being lost too.'

'And all hands perished?' said I. 'Yes,' he said, 'every one. No one could go near to help.' 'God help the poor wives and children,' said I. And then I asked him if he knew anything of a foreign woman, wife to one of the sailors of the 'Harold.' He thought a bit, and then asked if she wore a bright-coloured shawl over her head and looked like a gipsy, and I said yes. He did recollect her very well, he said. She had been to the office every day for some time before the ship was lost, to ask if the 'Harold' was come in. She had it written down, or he wouldn't have known what she meant. He had never heard of her since the wreck, but supposed she had had a share of the money that was subscribed in the town for the widows and orphans of the 'Harold.' Away I went to look for your poor friend, Mary, thinking how we could help her. Sir Bevil, I thought, might put her into one of his cottages: all sorts of things I thought of, except the true one. I soon found the cottage where you told me the waggoner had taken a lodging for the poor soul, and a decent woman came to the door. 'Is there a person from foreign parts lodging here, ma'am,' said I. 'There was one,' said she, 'a

poor thing that lost her husband in the ‘Harold,’ but she went away yesterday morning early.’ ‘Went away!’ I said, ‘where was she going?’ ‘Somewhere out Chorlby way, I think,’ the woman said. ‘It was very hard to make out her meaning, she had so little English; but I fancy she had some friends out that way, and meant to go to them.’

“This was all I could hear, Mary,” continued the miller, “except that she had received a comfortable sum of money from the subscription, and had had plenty left, after paying honestly every shilling she owed at Hargate. Her landlady spoke of her with great kindness, and said she had helped her to make a black gown, and had done her best to comfort her, but the poor soul was sadly cast down, and seemed to long to go back to her friends. I thought it must be you she meant, and I got frightened to think I had seen nothing of her on the road. Between two and three the coach was ready, and I left Hargate. I looked to the right and to the left, lest I should see a poor traveller with her baby, but there was nobody. The coast-road was cruelly cold, and the sleet and snow came in

heavy showers, almost blinding us at times. About a mile the other side of Fredham, it cleared for a few minutes. We were near a field with a large stack in one corner, and there was a bend in the road, so that we saw the inner side of the stack farthest from the sea. Young Brown was on the box by the coachman, and all of a sudden he pointed to the stack and shouted out, 'Look there, Mr. Wray! there's something moving in there. What is it?' The coachman drew up, and we saw a heap of something close under the stack. 'Look, look!' says Brown again, 'it's a woman's gown, and it moves!' Down got I and Brown in a second, cleared the hedge, and made our way through the heavy drift to the sheltered side of the stack, where there was just a little space clear of snow. Ah, Mary! there was a piteous sight! Sure enough, your poor foreign friend had made her last journey. She must have taken shelter, who knows when? but she had stripped herself of her warm clothing, and pulled out handfuls of hay from the stack to heap on the child, and the little creature was struggling to get out of the nest she had made for it. That was what we had seen moving.

As to the mother, she was never to move hand or foot again. I could have thought she was asleep, with her quiet face and her smooth hair, but I soon found how it was. She had given her life for the child. We carried the poor thing to the coach and laid her in it, and went on to Fredham. There the poor baby was warmed and fed, and then I came on here as fast as I could. The doctor said life had been gone for many hours, but the baby had come to no harm."

Mrs. Wray's tears fell quietly as she listened, and when her husband stopped speaking, she rose and laid her hand on his arm.

"John," she said, very gravely, "I think the poor thing's heart was broken, and she was on her way to bring the child to me. I will take her, and she shall be to me as my own child, in the place of the one that it has pleased the Lord to take away into heaven."

"I knew you would say so," said John Wray; "so may God bless our daughter Dora!"

This was how Dora came to Dayleford Windmill. What her father's name was no one ever knew, unless he were a "Charles Whewell," who perished in the "Harold." For the future the child

was called Dora Wray. The days and months passed on ; the frost gave place to spring ; flowers began to open in the miller's garden ; and a flush of gold came over the furze-bushes on the common. Little Dora thrrove in her new home. A pink colour, like the lining of a shell, was on her cheek, and her limbs had acquired so much strength, that instead of needing the help of a finger when she walked, as she had done at first, she could safely be trusted alone. She had given very little trouble to Mrs. Wray. There was a strange quietude about the child. She was never peevish or fretful ; indeed no one had ever heard her cry. A little plaintive moan, rarely uttered, was her only sign of distress. But if she did not cry like other children, neither had she the merriment which would have seemed natural to her age. All Johnnie's wildest antics could only awaken a gentle smile. The sweet, ringing laugh of babyhood could never be won from little Dora. Mrs. Wray, as she crooned old ditties over her work, would see the child come near to listen, and would wonder at the strange thoughtfulness of the little face. There could be no want of intellect with those calm, intelligent eyes ; but

still Dora was not like other children, and she did not yet attempt to speak, though she heard and understood all that was said to her.

In the long July days, Sir Bevil Norman and his family came down to the castle, and not many days after their arrival, a gay party of young people rode over to Dayleford Windmill. It was a lovely afternoon, the tide creeping softly up the sands, the low breeze humming in the sails as the great vanes of the mill swept round and round, making dancing shadows on the shore. The cottage garden was gay with blossoms, and Mrs. Wray sat in the porch with her work, watching the children, as Johnnie careered madly after the white butterflies, and Dora tottered from flower to flower, followed by an old terrier which had formerly lived in the stable, but had now attached himself to the child. Mrs. Wray rose to receive her visitors at the gate, and the two young ladies dismounted and came into the garden, kissing their old nurse with the utmost affection. Johnnie shyly slunk away, but Dora stood still and watched them.

“ Oh, what a darling! what a little beauty!” cried Miss Norman, as she caught sight of the

child ; and throwing herself on her knees in the path, she took Dora's hand and asked for a kiss. Dora held up her cheek at once, and submitted to all the caresses which ensued from both sisters, then withdrew her hand, and walked away with her dog. She went from plant to plant, touching the flowers gently and caressingly with her small fingers, but never plucking them ; stooping to smell them, and even kissing those that were most bright and fragrant.

"What a strange, lovely little thing !" exclaimed Emmeline Norman. "So that is Dora, nurse—the orphan you spoke of in your letters ? I never saw a prettier child."

"She is a dear child, Miss Emmeline," said Mrs. Wray ; "a child of a strangely quiet spirit. You see how she goes about among the flowers. She never does mischief like other children. She seems full of love, even for the flowers ; and everything seems to love her. The old dog there never took to any one before, but he licks her little hand, bless her ! and is as gentle as a lamb."

The rest of the riding-party had gone on, leaving a groom to hold the two horses ; so the young ladies were to spend an hour with their

old nurse. Emmeline chatted away to Mrs. Wray of all they had been doing in London. Adela watched Dora with interest, and sitting down on the garden-bank, began unconsciously to sing aloud an air that had been haunting her all day. The child stopped, turned, and came towards the singer; then, standing at her knee, listened with a look of unmistakable delight in her eyes. Adela was amused and sang on, holding out a hand to the little one, who drew nearer still, and was lifted to the singer's lap, where she sat listening breathlessly till the voice ceased; then she slipped down and returned to the flowers.

After this, the young ladies came often to the mill, and Dora's face would brighten at sight of Adela, who never failed to sing to the child. One day when the tide was out, Johnnie and Dora were playing on the sands, when Adela came, and, seating herself on a bit of rock, sang a gay song, to the sound of which Johnnie began dancing; but Dora left off trying to catch the shadows of the vanes as they flitted by, and stole, as usual, to the singer's side. Adela idly collected the seaweeds round her, and wove them into a wreath for the child's head, singing all the time. Dora

submitted to be crowned, and seated on a bit of rock hung with long damp ribbons.

“There,” cried Adela, when she had done; “come, nurse, and look at my pretty mermaiden;” and then she sang, loud and clear, Haydn’s Mermaid’s Song, repeating over and over again its burden of “Follow, follow, follow me.” The child showed more than usual animation; and from that time, whenever Adela came, she would sing Dora’s own song, as it was called, for the pleasure which the little one evidently felt in hearing that one above all others.

By and bye, when winter came again, in the long evenings while the miller made Johnnie work at his lessons, little Dora began at last to try to speak. Her words were very few but very sweet. She was altogether less silent than formerly, for, as she went about the room, or fondled her old dog, she would make a low humming sound that was certainly an utterance of joy, though of a joy very quiet and subdued.

So the tranquil years passed by at the mill, with little change besides the variation of the seasons, and the visits—frequent during each summer—of the young ladies from the castle, till

Johnnie was a tall boy of thirteen, ready to be sent away for two years' schooling. It would be very good for him, Mrs. Wray said, for his father wished him to become a fine scholar; so after Michaelmas he was to go to Chorlby School. So she busied herself with his clothes, though often with a heavy heart. It would seem very still by and bye without the boy's merry voice and blythe step; still it was for his own good, and he would come home in the holidays.

Meantime Dora was more than five years old, a tiny fairy still. It seemed to Adela Norman that there was little change or growth from year to year, but she loved the tender little one, and spent many a peaceful hour singing to her on the sands. She still called her the little mermaid, and was amused to see the placid face and fair head, with its crown of coloured sea-weed. Now, too, Dora's humming had resolved itself into an imitation of any striking tune which she might have heard frequently repeated, though the only words she ever sang were the burden of her original favourite "Follow, follow, follow me!" This she would warble loud and clear, as she wandered about in the house or out of it, and the shrill

treble tone made itself heard in spite of the washing of the tide and the click-clack of the mill-wheels.

"Nurse," said Adela one morning to Mrs. Wray, "mama wants to see Dora. Why should you not bring the child over to the castle?"

Mrs. Wray promised to do so, and a day was fixed. Johnnie drove his mother and Dora in the cart. It was a journey of only eight or nine miles over the plain, and then up a steep hill, on the side of which stood the castle, grey and ivied, with high battlements and heavy mullioned windows. The sloping park was richly wooded, and dotted with herds of deer, and gardens full of bright flowers lay close around the castle walls. Johnnie, though he had been there before, felt shy, and glad to retire under the excuse of attending to Paddy, but Mrs. Wray and Dora were taken at once to the young ladies' morning room, where they were eagerly welcomed, and made to take some refreshment. Dora seemed in no way disturbed by the strangeness or the grandeur of the place. She met Adela with her usual gentle smile of pleasure, ate ripe strawberries with evident satisfaction, but no surprise, though she had

never seen any before, and then went round the room, amusing herself by glancing at the pictures and statuettes with which the walls and tables were adorned. At the window she paused, and stretched out her hands with a murmur of delight, as her eyes fell on the brilliant beds of flowers below. As she still stood, seeming half inclined to rush out into the sunny garden, Adela opened the pianoforte and began to play a wild beautiful air. The child started, and flushed crimson. It was the first time she had heard any music but that of the human voice, and she listened spell-bound and wondering.

A messenger came to desire Adela to take the child to Lady Norman, and Adela gently led the little one away up the wide oak staircase and corridor to the sick room, which the lady of the castle was seldom able to leave. Lady Norman was always ill, always suffering, but there was nothing in her pale patient face to frighten any child, least of all a child like Dora. The love of her husband and children had surrounded Lady Norman with all sorts of beautiful things, and the breeze that cooled the room was laden with the scent of choicest flowers. Dora entered fear-

lessly, and took the thin outstretched hand, smiling at the questions asked in a low sweet voice, and looking up to Adela to answer for her.

"She is backward, mama," said Adela. "She speaks very little even now, though she is more than five years old. What can be the reason? She looks very sensible, but she seems to me like a person in a dream. She does not enter into anything, except music, and that always delights her."

"She is a tender little blossom," replied Lady Norman, caressing the fair head; "she does not look as if she were meant for this world's work. She must be a fairy, Adela. No human child was ever so small," and she smiled as she played with the little rose-tipped fingers.

Dora seemed as much at home here as she had been below, going round to examine the pretty objects in the room, and touching them gently when they specially pleased her. Tired at last, she lay quietly down on the carpet, as she was wont to do at home, and soon fell asleep. In the cool of the evening Adela took the child into the gardens and gathered flowers for her, showed her the tame deer in the park, and the doves in

the dove-cote, and still Dora looked on with the same calm smile, not surprised, but certainly happy.

Johnnie's day passed happily also. Many of the old servants at the castle were friends of Mrs. Wray, and for her sake were kind to the boy. The coachman took him to the stables to admire the horses, the dairymaid showed him the young calves, and the housekeeper supplied him with unlimited bread and jam. He was quite sorry when the day was over; and the miller, who had walked over to drive his family homewards (being doubtful of Johnnie's skill and prudence in going down the castle hill in the dusk), brought the cart out, and declared it was time to be going. Baskets of fruit for Mrs. Wray to make into winter preserves were handed into the vehicle, and last of all, when the rest were settled, Adela lifted Dora into Mrs. Wray's arms, where the little one slept peacefully long before they crossed the common under the bright stars.

The next morning found Mrs. Wray very busy with her jam, and very anxious to keep Johnnie out of the way, so she sent him for a walk with *Dora*.

Roughey, the old terrier, had died of sheer old age in the previous winter, and the miller had lately brought home a small puppy, which was quite a plaything for the children. Dora had seemed to miss her old playmate for a little while, and had looked about wistfully for a few days as if seeking him, and then he had been forgotten. This new and wilder favourite was more Johnnie's companion than hers, and the task of inducing him to follow was never an easy one. By dint of carrying and coaxing, however, on this particular day, he was conveyed at last to the desired spot ; a dell whence sand had formerly been dug away, now grown over with short grass and scattered bushes of furze. This green hollow was a favourite resort of the children, and Dora always guided old Blake there when he was left in charge of her on Sunday afternoons, while all the rest of the family were gone to church. A visit to Paddy first, then a scattering of corn to the poultry and the pigeons, and then a walk to the dell. This was the regular order of amusement with Dora and old Blake. So the child willingly went thither with Johnnie now, watched him race up and down the slope with the puppy barking at

his heels, and plucked at his suggestion handfuls of the golden furze-blossom to carry home in her pinafore. There was no lack of amusement till Mrs. Wray sent old Blake to say that dinner was waiting, and to carry the tired little one back in his arms. Dora laid her flowers aside carefully to play with again by and bye, and took her place at the table beside the miller.

"The child looks tired, Mary," he said, as he patted her head gently with his large hand. "This hot weather takes the colour out of her pretty cheeks and puts it into Johnnie's. She looks like a wee white lily."

"She must go to sleep after dinner," said Mrs. Wray. "Yesterday was a tiring day for her, and perhaps I ought not to have let her go out in the sun this morning."

Accordingly, after dinner, when the miller, having given Johnnie a task to do in the mill, set off to see Farmer Brown on business, Mrs. Wray put a pillow on the floor of the cool parlour, and bade Dora lie down and sleep. She lingered to watch the heavy lids droop over the blue eyes, then crept softly away, closing the door after her, and returned to her labours over the great fire in

the house-place. An hour later Johnnie looked in to say that his task was done, and to see if Dora would come out on the sands; but his mother looked in at the open window and saw that the little one was still sleeping, so Johnnie was obliged to be content with the puppy, which he roused from its dreams on the door-step, and took with him into the mill, to look out for a stray rat or mouse. Before returning to her work, Mrs. Wray stood for a moment in the shadow of a pear-tree close to the garden-gate, and looked about her. There was a hot mist over the common, half hiding the wooded hills far away, the tide was falling quietly, and a few large ships on the horizon seemed fixed and motionless, in spite of their outspread canvas. One little pleasure-boat with snow-white sails was tacking hither and thither not far from shore. All else looked asleep, for even the mill was not at work, and not a creature was to be seen moving along the shore. Intent on household cares, the miller's wife re-entered her dwelling, and two hours passed away before she went to see if Dora were still sleeping.

Meantime no human eye saw a little fairy

figure emerge from the miller's cottage, and flit hither and thither among the flowers: no one saw the tiny fingers lift the latch of the garden-gate, only when Mrs. Wray looked again into the parlour, Dora was gone. It was hardly a surprise, for, though the child was supposed to be unable to open the door, yet Johnnie might have come to fetch her unheard, while his mother was occupied. Still, she ought to wear her little sun-bonnet, for the heat was great even yet, though the tide had turned and the breeze was freshening. Mrs. Wray took the bonnet and went out to look for the truant. In the garden she could track her by the impressions of the small feet on the sandy paths, freshly raked yesterday. Outside were more impressions in all directions, centreing in a row of limpet and cockle-shells, enclosing a space over which the little one had strewn all her furze-blossoms, by way of garden. She had evidently been very busy; no doubt Johnnie had taken her into the mill, out of the hot sun. She could almost fancy, as she listened, that she could hear the sweet voice singing its frequent burden, "Follow, follow, follow me!"

At this moment, Johnnie's face appeared at an

open window of the mill, and his mother called to him to know if Dora was there.

"No, mother," he answered; "isn't she asleep? I've not seen her since dinner."

A great dread came over Mrs. Wray as she turned towards the sea, but her eyes were weak now, and dazzled with the glare of the sunshine, reflected in a thousand ripples as the tide flowed softly in, already half-way up the flat sands. Presently came the sound of a cry, almost a scream, and Johnnie dashed down the ladder, brushed past his mother, calling out as he tossed his jacket and cap down beside her—

"Tell old Blake to bring the boat! Dora is out on the farther rocks."

But old Blake had heard the cry and seen the danger, and was already rushing along the shore to the place where a boat was moored to a post; so Mrs. Wray could do nothing but run down to the edge of the water. Yes! out on the farthest rock, that would soon be covered by the tide sat little Dora, with ribbons of seaweed about her head, smilingly watching the waves rise higher and higher around her. She had taken off her shoes and stockings that she might dip her little

feet in the sunny sea, and as she felt it flow over them, she sang louder and clearer, “Follow, follow, follow me!” A few minutes more and there would be no room even for one of those small feet on the rock. But now came brave Johnnie, wading, floundering, at last swimming towards the fearless child. She caught sight of him at last, and held out her arms, and just as the water reached the highest point of her resting-place he was beside her, and had clasped his strong young arm round her. Then he looked round for help. He saw his mother wringing her hands as old Blake returned to the mill and fetched something, with which he immediately ran back towards the boat. Why were they losing time? He could not keep his footing long with Dora in his arms. He could not stand against the strong steady pressure of the tide, and how should he swim with that little one clinging to his neck? Why were they so long with the boat?

“Hush, Dora, hush!” said Johnnie, as the child continued, in her joy at his coming, to sing her favourite song. “Don’t sing now, dear, say a prayer;” and the little thing folded her hands round his neck, and said the simple words she

had been taught to repeat morning and evening. The words gave Johnnie fresh hope. His own heart rose in silent supplication and trust to his Father in heaven.

Meantime the mother watched in an agony of terror. Old Blake had come back to fetch a hatchet, the boat being fastened with a chain and padlock, the key of which was in the miller's pocket; and the chain resisted for a long time the old man's efforts to break it. Before it yielded, the tide had lifted the children from their resting-place, and Johnnie was manfully struggling in the water. All his efforts might have been in vain, encumbered as he was with the child, had not the party in the pleasure-boat observed what had happened, and borne down to the spot where the poor boy was struggling for very life. Strong hands drew him out of the water, and gently unwound Dora's arms from his neck, and then the boat swept on towards a small wooden pier, just below the spot where old Blake was still struggling with the chain. All was done so quickly that Johnnie did not lose consciousness, though he felt giddy and confused. He was sufficiently himself to be aware that the

ladies had wrapt coats and shawls round Dora, and that the child's face was whiter than he had ever seen it, with wide-open eyes looking steadily up to the sky. He even remembered his father's words that day at dinner—"she looks like a wee white lily"—but he could not speak to her just then. He felt strangely weak and dreamy: that was all. A sailor jumped out and hauled the boat close to the pier, while Mrs. Wray and old Blake drew near to receive the party. Johnnie needed help to cross the plank, but he rallied when he reached his mother and threw his arms round her neck in spite of all the bystanders, sobbing out the words, "She is safe, mother! Dora is safe!"

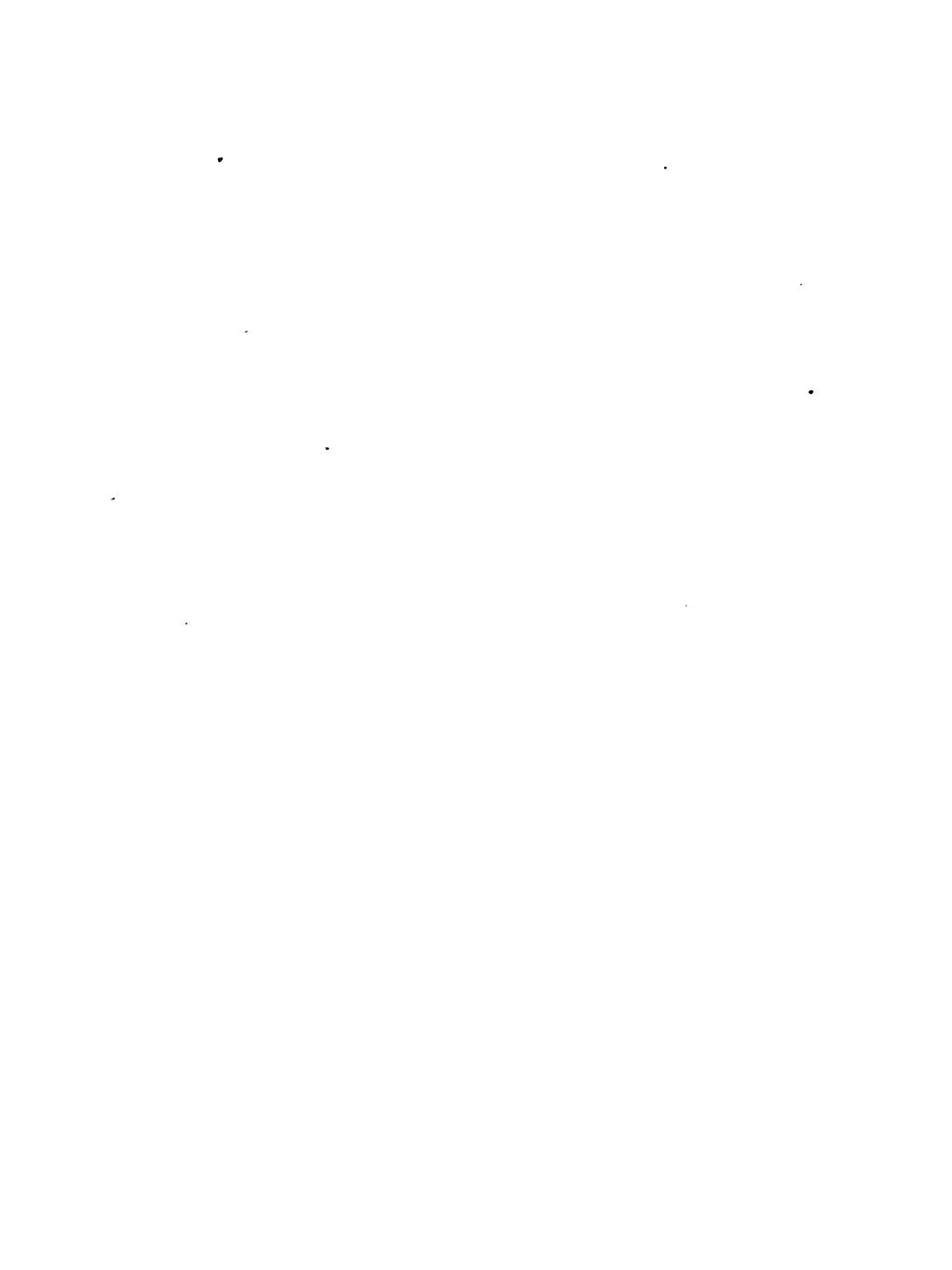
One of the gentlemen carried the little girl on shore, and laid her in Mrs. Wray's arms, and then helped Johnnie's uncertain steps as far as the cottage. Mrs. Wray tried to speak her gratitude to those whom God had sent to save her children, but she broke down into tears and sobs. They took leave of her and Johnnie at her own door, and she hurried the children into bed, and sat watching for the miller's return. A little sleep restored the boy, and he was ready to meet his

father with a bright face, but Dora seemed weak and weary, and lay quite still all the evening.

From this day little Dora drooped and faded. Whether the shock had harmed her no one could tell, but she gradually lost strength, and the colour never returned to her cheek. Very gentle, very loving she was to all around her, but she seldom spoke, and she never again sang. They all saw how it was with the child, though they could not speak of it to each other ; only they were if possible more tender to her than ever. If she went to the green dell now, it was in old Blake's arms ; if she sat on the sands the miller himself, or Johnnie, carried her to and fro. Adela Norman came often to see her little favourite, and sang to her still, but not the mermaid's song. Once, when she began that, a look of distress came into the blue eyes such as she could not bear to see ; so she never tried it again. She sang holy words, simple hymns which the child loved, though it was impossible to know how much of their meaning she understood. Often Adela remembered Lady Norman's words ; "she is not made for this world's work ;" they were coming true.

When the autumnal storms came sweeping over the sea, and the flowers in the miller's garden faded and died, little Dora fell asleep, so peacefully, so painlessly, that those who loved her could hardly dare to weep for her. But the winter hours were very still and sad in the miller's cottage, though many a time there were smiles as well as tears, when Mrs. Wray talked to Johnnie in the twilight of his two little sisters in heaven.





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